



ON THE PATH OF UNTRICKING HERMES

**Adaptation of the Design Philosophy and Methods of
Permaculture in Community Engaged Art Projects**

by

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Declaration of Originality

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the thesis, and to the best of my knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis, nor does the thesis contain any material that infringes copyright.

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The research associated with this thesis abides by the international and Australian codes on human and animal experimentation, the guidelines by the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and the rulings of the Human Research Ethics Committee (Tasmania) Network of the University.

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ABSTRACT

‘Thirty-nine!’

‘Believe me, we had 39 people today!’ Linda tells me, counting through her list as we sit down exhausted, but also elated, after hosting our constant flow of visitors over an eight-hour time period in our Lorinna home.

Within days, two thirds of the permanent members of this remote Tasmanian village visited our socially engaged art initiative: the *MugWall Social Café*. I love talking—but the café was more than an opportunity to chat amongst community members, both those locally active or who have rarely met. Whilst nibbling apple-pear cake, our visitors connected with an invented situation, in a *place* that is also a *service*: and they were also aware of participating in an art project—one that explores the inclusion of permaculture principles with social practice, as a form of artwork.

Sustainable thinking requires us to find art practices that resist both the destruction of our environment and the broadening of socio-economic gaps between people. Through my community-engaged art practice, I argue that such ethical project design parameters are essential to successful, and socially sustainable, outcomes in social (art) practice.

Pablo Helguera (2011) states that social practice (art) is rooted in openness: where artists reconstruct newly useful vocabularies by synthesising knowledge borrowed from different disciplines. The practice-led research in this project was informed by design principles derived from permaculture: and involved principles relating to observation, field-led investigation and critique. Permaculture combines an explicit ethical focus with ecological design methods (Holmgren 2002) and these can be pragmatically adapted to the field of social practice. Permaculture can also be understood as a holistic mode of thinking, which permeates lived experience. So within this project, it was also useful to draw upon phenomenological hermeneutics as a means to analyse this mode of engagement.

After an experimentally variant series of smaller projects designed to test the idea of social engagement as an art form capable of ‘sculpture’ (Luckenbach 2003), the research itself culminated in fieldwork in the community of Lorinna, a town populated by approximately one hundred self-identifying residents. Located in a hidden valley alongside Cradle Mountain, the Lorinna ‘community’ comprises an intriguing mix of people who variously identify as long-term settlers, ‘hippies’, retirees, vacationers and ‘alternative’ lifestyle-seeking families and individuals. The social composition and environs of the area fitted well with both the demands of immersive engagement, and the need to host a type of laboratory situation—a situation in which it was possible to be *welcomed* as a participant-observer. The artwork produced by field experience sought to embrace the holistic nature of permaculture and led to a body of work that was focused variously on concept and process as well as material outcome.

Material outcomes—including elements of public intervention and installation works—were also born of collaborative processes, and the *MugWall Social Café* provides an illustration of how this works. The processes involved in conceptualising as well as facilitating the ‘events’ in situ are processes that constitute elements of the work itself. Furthermore, the social interactions, material artefacts and documentation each formed part of the work and, for this reason, it is intended that the creative work, material artefacts and process collapse into one.

This research highlights the interdisciplinary interrogations and collaborations that can be enabled through social practice, and how the interaction between community-engaged art and permaculture is potentially transformative for both disciplines.

A core conclusion of this investigation is that the process of integrating permaculture design principles with social practice is not suited to a prescriptive set of actions or the automated replication of a complete system. Instead, a reduced model is proposed in which the constant flux of decisions and actions informed by permaculture depend upon the context, role and identity of an artist within a community. To begin with, I modify the permaculture principle ‘observe and interact’ to ‘observation through interaction’ in order to better sit within a hermeneutically informed, participant-observer engagement approach that seeks out methods that are sustainable, whilst retaining the personally interpretive and in situ capacity to evolve.

My four central ‘model’ findings read:

1. Spend as much time in observation as is practicable.
2. Find a personally intuitive way to transition from ‘tool’ to ‘attitude’.
3. Live with, rather than work with, a community, and
4. Avoid ‘trickery’ to *practice* ‘small and slow solutions’ instead.

This culminating distillation perhaps sounds overly simplified. But the process of reaching this model—and finding a realizable means to actually practice it—was by far the most difficult outcome to achieve within my research. The collective objectives to observe, holistically imbue an attitude, and live as a connected member of the Lorinna community also consolidated in my need to avoid forms of antagonistic social practice that I came to think of as cheapened, non-solutions oriented ‘trickery’. This creative-theoretical resolution represents what I feel to be my most significant reflection directly resulting from this research, where my role as a practice led artist—understood in a metaphorically personified hermeneutic term—provided the title ‘The un-tricking of Hermes’.

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Manifesto

Nothing is entirely like so, —I say. So everything I can tell you might be valid from fifteen different points of view but is not from another one. And possibly, for you, exactly this sixteenth standpoint seems to be the most important. So for you, I have failed.

Everything I can tell you is refutable. For everything I can talk about to you, probably its diametric opposite can also be proved too. But furthermore: we cannot learn everything, so in whatever I declare, my data must be insufficient. Moreover, my data could be inaccurate too.

But throw away the half of what I say, and you can still benefit from the rest. Because you will find that mostly I have some truth in what I have ascertained over my long life and my endless contemplations. Well, if you pay close attention.

But do not listen merely with your mind, because that is not enough for me. Do it with your whole spirit, or let's say, with your whole organism, then you will more understand me. And more and more as time progress, I can ensure you.

(Füst 1977, trans. Tamas Oszvald, p. 5)

PREFACE

I love talking.

When I talk, I feel I am alive. I feel strong and that I have something to say.

Talking can have different forms, but it is always social interaction, a form of communicative action. In my practice I engage in social interaction as art, which is called socially engaged art and also social (art) practice (Helguera 2011). For me, Jeremy Deller's artist statement describes my journey the most aptly: 'I went from being an artist who makes things, to being an artist who makes things happen.' (Thompson 2012, p. 17).

The journey of my art practice, or I could say my life, has driven me through more traditional forms. I have pursued film camera and darkroom work, become a wood craftsman, a performer and a storyteller. And now I am a culture worker (Becker & Wiens 1995) or an instigator 'whose speciality includes working with society in a professional capacity' (Helguera 2011, p.3).

I still have frailties of communication. Perhaps less often now, but still: I repeat myself. And this repetition can dilute argument. I do not want to force my opinion; I just want to be clear. The question how to be clear—particularly within and about my social practice—is a recurring one, as exemplified by reflection after my engagement with institutional ethical applications experienced with the university's Human Research Ethical Committee. Talking has long become a fundamental element of my art practice when I perform. I collect and share stories, and observe the environment in which I operate when interacting with people. I practice this in every form of community, starting on the level of my own family.

Peck (1987) once said that family is the smallest form of a social community. And my socially engaged art is based upon where I live with my own family and as a part of a small rural community. As poet Patrick Jones coined the label 'Artist as Family' to encapsulate the identity of himself and his family as a practicing collective (2013); so the relation between his family and his work parallels the role of art within my own family, as:

Whilst many artists continue to resist biography as a mode of interpretation... Artist as Family place their domestic life in the center of their work – drawing attention to the way that personal relationships sustain artistic practice. Their work is a celebration of the resilience and creativity of family life. It is also a political statement about the value and purpose of art as a generative force for change, rather than a system of consumption. (Muller 2010, p. 15)

I would also argue that when an art project uses auto and familial biography as a deliberate interpretive mode, that it can only become properly comprehensible via a

narrative context, which transparently discloses something of the internal processes of making meaning. Within this exegesis text, such biography appears within vignettes, signposting moments where I as writer strove to poetically reconcile the research experience within a lived and familial world. The method helped to create a process to bridge experiential findings with formal discourse, that with more time might create rhythmic patterns that are better resolved. My style regarding these sections then could be described as (an imperfect) ‘ficto-criticism’ that rather than expressing divisions between fiction, theory and criticism via more established methods. This method of writing is experimentally employed in an attempt at ‘generically transgressive writing that blurs the defining lines between creative and critical texts.’ (Flavell, 2004, p. iii.)

As Flavell further describes:

‘The tension between ficto-criticism as an open practice and the tradition of scholarly writing, which requires a clear fixed proposition and outcomes, mirrors the project of ficto-criticism, which seeks to unlearn one’s authority and privilege as the beginning of a process towards developing an ethical relationship with the other.’ (Flavell, 2004, p. iii.)

Within creative and project outcomes, I made a choice. Simply, I decided that the kind of ‘ethical relationship’ Flavell points to here corresponds with my own intuitive findings with autobiographical meaning-making forms of text: the type of disclosure shared within such vignettes may better communicate the practice-led spirit of this project, than deleting or delaying such moments until their overall textual syncopation could become complete.

SCENE 1. LAKE/1.

Recently my family and I—including my wife Linda and our children, Misi and Rozi—were in Launceston for my third-year thesis review meeting. The meeting went well, although there was recurrent anxiety around the repeated expression: ‘body of writing’.

I am Hungarian and my English, as a second language, is not terribly sophisticated. I did however do sufficiently well in the IELTS language exam to be accepted for placement and scholarship through the university. The British Council set the exam for the day the doctors predicted my daughter would be born. My daughter was in fact born only days after my exam was complete. Her birth, and those exam results, began our particular family adventure as a collective moving between communities.

My son was not born at home, but was born into my outstretched hands. I was able to catch him entering into this world, and then carefully lift him onto Linda’s arms. One body from another. A body for new stories. An independent body, but one forever part of my story, and my body. My body of writing. In Hungarian, we don’t say *body of*

writing. But I can visualise it as an imagined human body drawn over with text. It is the body of my wife.

The naked body of my wife Linda stood in the cold water of Lake Cethana yesterday, hugging the limp and naked form of our three-year-old daughter. We had just returned from Launceston, where I'd had a meeting with supervisors. And after two and a half hours of driving under a blistering sun with our nauseous little girl, we stopped as usual by the sign that points 'To the lake' before completing our journey home again: home to a tiny and makeshift home, on Ladybird Lane, in Lorinna.

This township where we live and carry out my research is in the Kentish municipality, in Tasmania (For a detailed map see Appendix 6). The community of Lorinna is an organically grown, low income demographic of off-the-grid families, gardeners and small scale farmers focused on sustainability: where the community focus on sustainability is exemplified by such cooperative efforts as a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) project, organic cattle initiatives and vegetable farms, and small income generating, home-based enterprises. It is a remote and rural area and it houses no more than 100 people, across thirty independent households. Lorinna itself was a near-abandoned former gold mine settlement when 'hippies' rediscovered it in the 1970s. They identify themselves as 'hippies', and this is not my judgment call, not that the term holds any judgment for me. The residents also comprise a spread of retirees and young families from culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse backgrounds.

Lorinna is a place without a pub, church, or public school. There is however a successful home education group – consisting of 8 families and 18 children – which exists in part as a product of isolation, but also of deliberate choice. As a group, Lorinna residents understand that every aspect of the community works together as a holistic tool for nourishing children in many connected facets of everyday life. Hence the educators include not only the children's direct families, but also the broader community as a whole. Their informal educational mission statement can be described to support life-long learning via an enriched environment of everyday living, knowledge and skill-sharing that fosters communal engagement.

I was talking with a neighbour from Lorinna while Linda and Rozi stood together in the cold waters of the lake. And I paid no attention to my loved ones while I was talking. They however were shivering from the cold water, waiting for me to pass them the only towel we had with us. The towel was tightened around me as I had just gone for a swim. But because I was in conversation, I could not hear them call. They were standing and cold, both female and naked together; two deeply connected beings from two generations. Shivering while I talked.

I love talking, and feel I was born to it. My most beloved primary school teacher told my mother once: This boy, you will see him become a politician! I thought I was spared this fate, however, when accepted into the Hungarian University of Fine Arts. But I quickly became chairman of the academy's student government: reopening the speculative possibilities of a political career. Thankfully that was not to be, as I turned

instead towards arts of social participation, offering alternate modes of social change agency.

I now live in the stories that I hear, create and retell. And my writing drifts with my imaginings between verbalization and imagery. I have a visual mind. I don't like statistics or predetermined constructs and never did. But I have always loved the way ideas and historical patterns cross-pollinate: where motives and culture intersect over seemingly unrelated events. Feeling inspired by large-scale social patterns made me feel ready for research. Having supposed myself to have become wise enough, I thought I might also write about it. If you who read this now are not one of my supervisors, and are neither editor nor proofreader nor friend, it likely means the miracle of my exegesis, in which I have personal stories to tell, is now complete. Personal stories of connection and projects; personal failings and success. This narrative is the very method I may well have been looking for all this time. The 'story' that *is* my research.

We were arguing by the time we got home from the lake, as Linda was still shaking, and agitated by my mute response to her frozen lakeside call. I did my best to say I was sorry, I really was. Usually I am very good at consoling people and, as the Hungarian phrase puts it: 'talking a hole into the tummy'. And the picture of this wanted outcome of consolation smoothly marries with my starting point image: of a 'body of writing'. And again I see that naked female form—layered over with text—and now baring a rounded hole around her stomach region. My wife in the narrative sculptural form.

Scene ends

If somebody from a non-art background asks me what kind of artist I am, and I do not have the time to go into detail, I generally tell them that I am a sculptor. Alternatively, I can say I am a teacher, or a media artist. And each of these things is variously true. I cannot draw. My wife Linda used to kiddingly ask me, how can I be an art teacher if I cannot draw? But the fact remains: I would never have had the possibility of going to art school at the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts if it wasn't for the existence of a small department, called the Intermedia Faculty, within the Academy. This was the only faculty where classical drawing skills were not required by the rigorous admissions process, and that was a haven for me. Instead, we were taught to think, observe and interact. We were encouraged to live the concept of intermedia, existing between different media, and not to privilege any particular one. We were trained to become the liminal persona of culture making.

One of our teachers was quite a revolutionary, and used to connect the etymology of the word *media* with the Persian meaning of *carriage*. His interpretation of our *Intermedia Faculty* was thus to mean *among or between alternate carriages*: where artists operated via the freedom to choose on which carriage to travel. He never set out to verify this etymology as a fact, and it is highly possible that his lectures were more

like unique performances than they were traditional lectures. However they are the key presentations from that period that I still recall. The ethos of the faculty was about striving to balance academic and theoretical elements with experimental, spontaneous and collaborative ones, and this has decidedly shaped my practice. Officially the faculty states that: 'In the program, students learn to develop, in accordance with their own unique skills and abilities, an active and creative presence in the cultural spheres of information society.' (MKE 2013). In the creative and interpretive spirit of the *Intermedia Faculty*, I would say that what I learned here was a capacity for continuous movement between different disciplinary fields, mediums, and techniques: to refine – and if need be redefine – cultural messages in ways that reflect a perpetual choice about what is most relevant, re-inventive and alive.

PART ONE: FRAMEWORKS

The structure of my thesis is designed to enable me to address the question: in the light of my objectives, dispositions, creative history, and specificity of my project situation, how is it possible for me to develop and substantiate a model that might have useful applications for likeminded practitioners? The solution I came to was to engage the demands of the thesis in the context of key sub-narrative components. This begins with the preface, where I seek to establish the personal narrative within a hermeneutic engagement.

PART ONE includes three chapters centred upon the primary research question: ‘How can permaculture ethics and principles be applied to community engaged art projects?’ Chapter 1 aims to communicate important elements of the journey, which led to the formulation of the primary, and secondary research questions to begin with. After the Introduction, Chapter 2 lays down the personal, experimental and theoretical narrative definitions that established a framework for praxis. Here I look at the narrative of praxis exploring intersections between two influential practitioners and my own socio-political journey as an artist. It is followed by the experimental narrative of early pilot project works, highlighting the emerging framework, which initiated the main body of fieldwork research, and finally I also seek to further situate this emerging framework within the broader theoretical field. Chapter 3 begins to situate the project within the narrative of permaculture with the objective of providing the reader with the last core component of the theoretical framework: required to place research methods and fieldwork into context within PART TWO.

CHAPTER 1 – Introduction: Defining Questions

Whatever trust and confidence we may have had in the institutions which effectively run the show here on earth – corporations, banks, political parties, and religions – has been undermined by a profusion of evidence that they do not have a grip on the global problems of which we are now so thoroughly aware.

(Zimmer 2015)

When it comes to the drive to create local and global changes, we are confronting a point of challenge. We face a period of ‘awareness without power’ (Zimmer 2015) in which information volumes can become so daunting as to disempower audiences, and obfuscate the means to act on important issues. And it was for these reasons – the need for both simplicity, and direct forms of action in my art practice – that permaculture first attracted me: as a potential means to create healthfully motivated community engagements. Permaculture is not exalted within this text, or is at least not intended to be – as whilst I hold a genuine affinity for the ethical and design principles of the ‘system’ - my selection of it as a framework was to some extent arbitrary. Permaculture does offer a decidedly *accessible* design system, and one attractive one for an artist seeking to operate from an accessible philosophical basis with existing methodological foundations. Within this context of my initial attraction to permaculture, I still needed to clearly articulate a primary research question. This came simply to be **‘How can permaculture ethics (or philosophy) and principles (or methods) be applied to community engaged art projects?’** In the early stages of research, this question also came from the desire to find a systemic approach to dealing locally with globally important issues: in ways that are immediate, personal, authentic, and achievable.

When praxis means working with people, the pursuit is also inevitably broadly political: a characteristic that impacts ‘...each and every performance [...] as social events that take place in the public sphere’ (Vujanović & Milohnić 2011, p. 95). Permaculture systemically encourages practitioners to directly connect the personal with the political; but there are vast differences of interpretation as to how this ideally comes about. According to Chantal Mouffee ‘the political concerns the manner of constituting society with antagonism as an essential characteristic’ (Kunst 2011, p. 127). In this project, I didn’t want to operate by antagonisms that I had come to understand as a particular form of ‘trickery’. This stance prompted further research questions. Firstly: **might the application of permaculture (ethics and principles) offer legitimate, ‘trickery’-free, non antagonistic alternatives—to a practice that is still political—via participatory practice?** And secondly, **could such (non antagonistic) alternatives offer a ‘model’ or other useful findings for likeminded engagement practitioners?**

My own ‘politicality’ began taking shape quite some time ago, as I became increasingly aware of environmental issues and local civil initiatives as a street performer.

Performance offered a sphere in which I first came to hear about both permaculture as a holistic design system; and about practitioners who provided examples of ‘social permaculture’ applied to engagement art practice. These practitioners not only dealt with environmental themes, but also sought ways to integrate environmental propositions into their lives. This holism I observed, influenced the nature of their art practice. At the commencement of my research, recalling these practices brought me to an intuitive agreement with Helguera’s proposition (2011) about social engagement skills having an adaptive capacity. The natural dynamics of art and social engagement did seem to bring the required capacity to adapt to in situ demands and I suspected, offered a potential means to question the *raison d’être* of social engagement standards.

I undertook research in order to establish whether my sense of how permaculture design systems might benefit engagement practices could be substantiated. I looked for ways to adapt permaculture principles methodologically, hoping to discover useful principles for designing sustainable community engaged art projects. Key objectives of this research, then, were to strive toward a model drawn from practice-led case study examples and research findings. In other words, I hoped to contribute a worked reference of value to likeminded engagement practitioners and potentially others who have an interest in ‘social permaculture’ and/or perhaps, finding politically potent alternatives to creative antagonism. An ensuing question became the following: **‘As a practitioner, how might I work from inspirational case studies and examples, to a personalized *modus operandi* that can help those interested in ‘social permaculture’ and holistic practice?’**

My own role as an artist in this project came to be primarily defined via a symbolic reading of ‘Hermes’ - as an imaginatively personified figure of an ‘intermediary’ within phenomenological hermeneutics. As an emergent interpretive character, ‘Hermes’ offered a means to synthesize multiple forms of meaning across densely interdisciplinary narratives. And so it was through Hermes that I interpreted my own ‘role’ as well as developed the role as part of a framework that I hope might serve others.

It was somewhat ironic that in my desire to cultivate a freer seeding of engagement, I was brought into commitments that took me oftentimes away from direct engagement, and into the less familiar and more structured demands of academic writing. I had always been wary of the linear, abstracted and immobile qualities of writing; and more comfortable with the spoken word, which is in essence a non-material form. Even recording a voice separates the spoken act from the multiple important contexts in which it was once embedded. And transcription of a recorded voice loses even further layers of immediacy. So, this project took me out of my comfort zone, pushing me towards personally lesser-known edges, requiring that I maneuver between oral and written media, creation, and liminal modes of exchange.

My peculiar ambivalence towards writing partially stemmed from accounts of its increasing historical prevalence in which writing progressed out of a loss of faith in the capacity of oral history to pass on information through generations (Jones, 2013). I was intuitively convinced by arguments which stated that with increased economic development and greater wealth, powerful people often used writing to glorify, immortalize, and variously manipulate history (Csányi, 1989). So for me it was a revelation to read Patrick Jones's dissertation *Walking for food - Regaining permapoesis* (Jones, 2013). I was elated to be able to reference a real 'permie' (person who applies permaculture to their garden, property, or life) within my research. Jones is a poet and activist who coined the term 'permapoesis' to refer to an ethic of 'making that comes from permaculture living practices' (2013, p. xi). He also began his exegesis with a description of writing as an 'impermanent technology used for the transmission of ecological transition with a view to an eventual return to oral society' (Jones, 2013 p. 11). In this project, my out-of-comfort-zone writing requirements led me to seek (theoretically) situating solutions that draw upon my narrative storytelling and performing disposition.

I have now heard from many sources that only writing develops the articulation of the ideas. And I experience this as clearly true while revisiting my research ideas, and discovering personal knowledge gaps and contradictions. Nonetheless I feel in abiding agreement with Patrick Jones when he says, 'With writing we are not often listening together, we are more often than not alone employing institutional literacy to assist us with our aggregating estrangement' (Jones, 2013, p. 11). Nonetheless I do strive to temper my personal resistance to the written form: and now see spoken words as those which initiate stimulus in my reasoning; and writing as an opportunity to consolidate meanings, polish ideas toward consistency, and attend to meaning upon the page. This way, I try to negotiate academic demands with authenticity.

The interactive engagements of any practitioner inevitably occurs within an 'ethically charged' field. Especially perhaps, when institutionally monitored and controlled. Tensions between in situ social engagements and institutionalized ethics played a key role within my research: spurring questions about the limits of permacultures' adaptability to practice, and capacity to embrace alternate critical methods into synthesis.

The desire for uncompromised synthesis remained pertinent to my attempts to reconcile the ethical principles of permaculture, with those institutionally required. Within an academic research context, any investigation in which human interactions are necessary must have formal ethics approval. But it is not always immediately apparent how the formal demands relate to the ethics of permaculture. Within the academic setting for instance, one primary function of systemic (ethical) demands is to aid in risk prevention. And the current mechanisms, which are currently lent for the most part from other disciplines, require that there be detailed planning of intended social interactions in advance. Research thus becomes a predefined activity in which participation is provisioned and verifiably stipulated by signed participant

consent. But socially engaged art practice, and social forms of permaculture, are *unpredictably lived* experiences; where just like life, the vital activities in question cannot by nature be known—let alone planned in advance. In fact the beauty of social practice is found within its holistic and real-time integration; and being fluidly open to unpredictable happenstance is at the heart of socially open praxis and inclusivity. The historic (and still present) ethical challenges of research have included an amalgam of needs to reduce harm: be these in normative forms of minority group exploitation, or the likes of legal risk. But in the desire to quantifiably reduce unwanted consequences, there are current ethical costs emerging that require cooperative revisitation and discipline specific refinements.

In permaculture, ethical and design principles are not intended as ‘a tool kit’ to help us accommodate our aggregating estrangement. Rather, they offer a holistic mode of living that works via voluntary and in situ engagement. In this way, the collective principles of permaculture act as sign-posts to a perpetually reintegrating holistic practice – that ultimately become so fundamentally embedded within praxis that their application is all but impossible to separate from personal consciousness. The shift from ‘rules’ to ‘consciousness’ may sound idealistic – and perhaps even grand to some readers. But the principles of permaculture are really intended as practical guides to everyday thought processes and actions. The principles are meant to aid the development of positive outcomes as opposed to destructive ones; and derived from several community forms and cultures referenced by David Holmgren. Furthermore, Holmgren actively encourages practitioners to reach outside of prevailing norms for sustainable solutions. On this he states:

Permaculture ethics are distilled from research into community ethics, learning from cultures that have existed in relative balance with their environment for much longer than more recent civilisations. This does not mean that we should ignore the great teachings of modern times, but in the transition to a sustainable future, we need to consider values and concepts outside the current social norm (Holmgren, 2013b).

Although there are many potential means to apply permaculture to an arts practice, this study will focus only on a lived experience, within a specific locale, and from the point of view of community engagement as art. Within this exegesis, I aim to situate permaculture inspired engagement art within a context that travels *between* differently conceptualized ethical spaces: including academia, site-specific practice, and authentic holistic praxis.

CHAPTER 2 – The Narrative Of Praxis

*If Mr Antal Horger's pleased
our poet's grammar-study's ceased -
folly's jollies -*

*no high school, but a nation I,
although he like not, by and by
shall teach, shall teach.*

(Attila József)

Chapter 2 is divided into three main sections: each corresponding to major strands of narrative definition. Respectively, these sections elaborate upon the personal, experimental and theoretically situating narratives, which enabled me to establish a practical position within the major fieldwork.

SECTION 1 – Setting the Field – The Personal Narrative

I graduated with an MA in both Intermedia Arts and Fine Art Teaching simultaneously, and became an artist in Hungary during fascinating times. Tempted out of the shadows of soft communism and into the perceived freedoms of Central European capitalism, Hungary then rabidly sought to become part of the global machinery and soon became flooded by information and misinformation alike, as provided by the new technological platforms of television, print media and the internet. These rapidly changing times shaped my role as an artist in society as I became a ‘manager’ of contemporary art practice. I developed context-responsive methods and embraced open definitions of ‘art’ in which almost anything was allowed, so long as it served the intended objective of each project. My areas of interest have only broadened over time and, in the past 20 years, I have come to be involved in social issues, politics, different NGO art practices, as well as in alternative education projects. However, I’ve always worked with people – teaching, organising and supporting all sorts of projects – and because of this I have come to be labelled alternately as either a *community artist* or a *culture worker* (Becker & Wiens 1995).

In this Section I begin my foray into cultural engagement reinvention by identifying a current and authentic basis for redefining my field and research intentions, for field-based praxis. To these ends, I wish to explore those recurring personal reflections upon the outskirts of my own practice that—whilst perhaps not apparently central to my academic history of practice—evoke an important resonance with those of my intentions most formative to my current research direction. Then, I explore two key case studies of engaged art practice that most informed my work. The first case study looks at work by Alfredo Jaar and the second, the group LABOFII. And whilst I owe a debt to many other practitioners in the field, including Fritz Haeg, Nils Norman, Xin

Cheng and Tattfoo Tan, the two case studies selected were particular inspirations to me with the form of their *directness* of social engagement and with their approach to holistic synthesis in combining a broader and openly declarative political consciousness with immersive experiential interactions, and personally authentic lifestyle choices.

PERSONAL NARRATIVE REFLECTIONS

Harvest Market (Spring 2011)

We are standing on stilts, and towering over the crowd. It is a beautiful summer Saturday morning in the small Hungarian town of Nagymaros. The town lies between the foothills of the Borzsony Mountains and the wide, slow-flowing Danube. The scene almost approaches kitsch as the morning sun glints upon the dewdrops of vivid green leaves. And we stride carefully across the also dew-covered cobblestones. Four performers are roaming through a wandering crowd: three of us up on stilts wearing drum-sets, and one on the ground playing the hurdy-gurdy. It is a festive atmosphere, but at the same time it is homely. The air is filled with optimism and pride, but also with questions. Today is the first harvest market day. It is a local grass-roots initiative, organised by the town's civil association. The criterion for stallholders is simple: they must live and make products within a 30 km radius of the market. As I amble along on my stilts, the event has a deeply historical sense about it. Just opposite, on the other side of the Danube, Visegrad Hill is topped with a towering castle. And this very square was once a field for medieval tournaments and markets, so it is not surprising that I feel enchanted. I feel joy to be part of something new, something community based, local and grass roots. Everybody is volunteering at the event, including the performers. As a performer, I share the skills I have in support of the community. There's no need for an explanation about the underlying art, social practice or engagement involved. I need only do what I am good at: to walk on stilts and function as the market crier, and to make people happy. This was my achievement as a contemporary artist who had stopped making 'Art'. And yet, as I now believe, this *was* art. Performing art. Street theatre. We—my wife Linda and I—were the Theatre of the Roaming Trees. A beautiful name, coined by Linda, and loved by me.

Now I am talking to stallholders, and joking with the locals. They are laughing. I am laughing. I say and do what I want. There is no alignment with any institutionalised rules and policies, or any concern with contemporary art trends. And it is liberating. I had stepped out from the art world a few years prior, after being involved with a problematic community engaged art project in Prague, as part of an artist residency. And I had since become a theatrical street performer instead: to entertain people. This was not planned. Instead my wife, a skilled and long-term stilt-walking performer, had become pregnant. And she had urged me to learn the performance skills required to keep the business going. So we had one month in which to train me for my first performance engagement. I walked slowly, and without Linda's elegance, but I didn't fall. And that was enough. I soon fell in love with the practice and the freedom it gave me, as a town crier, to simply *talk*.

After becoming a regular performer at the event, I would hear surrounding stallholders chat about new methods of gardening, and about permaculture. I would hear the words 'free of chemicals', 'no dig' gardening, and 'mimicking nature'. The produce was fresh and green, and the stallholders relaxed. And, in exchange for drawing children and families into the market, my entertainments were repaid in organic produce and handmade supplies. The warmth of the stallholders' generosity made me feel welcome and connected to my locality, and also made me feel that my role, as part of a community, mattered.

The experience of spontaneously integrated chaos, and gardening, and free-flowing thoughts, reminded me of being a student of Professor Ivan Ladislav Galeta within the Intermedia Faculty of the Academy. It prompted me to revisit his words online, which read:

During the last several years, I have been committed to building up my own 'artistic landscape' according to the principles of traditional agriculture and experiences of Claude Monet (Life at Giverny), Béla Hamvas, Masanobu Fukuoka, Bill Mollison, Ruth Stout... Since 1995, I have worked towards the introduction of permaculture principles and to organise agricultural consciousness in Croatia. (Galeta 1996)

Galeta (Autumn 2002)

It was possibly 2002 and, after a four-year diversion into traditional woodcarving practices, I had returned to the Art Academy's Intermedia Faculty to continue my studies. Professor Ivan Ladislav Galeta, from Zagreb University, was lecturing. He was both the Head of the New Media Faculty and a legendary experimental filmmaker. Those of his films that we watched were complex, layered works that integrated seemingly simple subjects with layers of philosophical meaning and geometric analysis that question assumptions about aesthetics and the potential for visual experience within the medium.



Figure 1: Ivan Ladislav Galeta, *Blackboard is not deleted one semester*, performance documentation, 2011, digital image. Photograph by Ivan Ladislav Galeta.

And whilst watching his documentary garden work, what kept me glued to my uncomfortable lecture room seat was his manner of picking fruit, collecting crops and orchestrating an in-situ performance, reflecting the spontaneous flow of his highly multicultural imagination. On a blackboard, he writes with chalk and a wet sponge. And geometric symbols emerge alongside ancient symbols, becoming ever more layered with chalked drawings, and new spaces emerging from the wet sponge. The blackboard for Galeta was, and still is, a means to unleash ideas rather than to illustrate them (Galeta 2009). And as Fowkes describes:

Galeta is a passionate gardener, inspired educator, and conceptual artist, for whom everything is interconnected: the blackboard is a means for artistic expression as well as a teaching tool, tautological notations and diagrams point to the complexity of the world, while picking his own tomatoes becomes an opportunity to make an avant-garde film. (Fowkes, 2006)

The results are suggestive and charismatic, as a man who performs his view of life. He talks about humus and humour, seeds and plants, James Joyce and the cyclic connections of the universe. And when he drew a spiral, I felt it suck me in. I spent three months of that year studying within his faculty. And whilst his lectures and demonstrations amazed me, I graduated without ever fully being able to identify the nature of his long-term influence upon me.

Garden (Spring 2012)

In 2012, we finally have a garden. It is a strange situation as we share it with a neighbour who owns part of the house we live in. I cannot say that we have a good relationship with her. She hardly talks to us. She does say hello, but that is all. She was not happy with me putting up a fenced area in the garden for vegetables, but it was necessary as she has an old, half-blind hunting dog that would not respect our intention for gardening at all. The garden itself is a tiny 2 x 5 metre rectangle, and I know my grandfathers would have begun gardening by digging. But, with an aversion to the masculine penetration of the surface material, I also refer to Galeta's practices—and those of the more recent market gardeners—instead, who had each mentioned 'no dig' gardening. I start with a fence as a frame for creation. Galeta had talked about gardens as artworks, suggesting that just as an artist's canvas is formed by the frame, the garden is a delineated space of intervention as marked by a fence-line (Nagy 2015). The bounded land becomes a consciously defined space, in an action that abstractly separates it from the surrounding environment. The edge defines more of a freedom to act intentionally than a bounded artifice: as protozoa, microorganisms and birds are all welcome to wander through the fence-line.

In the attempt to create a healthy garden, my journey inadvertently begins. I discover the logic of sheet mulching, composting and companion planting. Then seemingly unrelated material at first: ethics, pattern recognition, and vector systems of design. The word 'permaculture' starts fleshing out with meaning, and an approach to art as a way of life starts to unfold. Permaculture forums are full of discussions about life

processes, natural and built environments, animal ethics, food security, consumerism, social justice, and about community. I am hooked. I am reminded of former efforts to create vital projects for social betterment, and find my interest is rekindling as I begin to envision a way. With more information, I might be able to realise what Fowkes (2014) had talked about when referring to Galeta. I could become a practitioner 'who not only deal[s] with environmental themes as subject matter for their work, but also find[s] ways to integrate environmental positions into their lifestyles, which, in turn, influences their practice' (Fowkes 2014). With Galeta once again highly influential in my life, I am aware our methods will need to differ. His process is one of private retreat where gardening, whilst literal, is layered with reflective meaning in primarily documentary forms whilst my own practice, as I began imagining, involved a similar integration of concept and gardening and everyday life, only the 'cultivation' occurred through engagements with people.

Within permaculture, digging is avoided in order to prevent destroying the humus of the soil (Lanza 1998). Instead, organic material is added to existing top layers to allow nutrients to trickle down, enabling a natural environment to sustain itself. And similar principles might well apply to social environs. Rather than overturning the existing surface structures to plant new growth, providing *cultural* nourishment might provide a means to organically infiltrate, and nurture, an existing *social* ecology. Storytelling and the introduction of rituals might be such a way to 'embed' within a community, as a feeding medium, where by slow but sustainable social solutions, an artist's role might dissolve into an infiltration of everyday practice. The narrative mediums might feed the social environment as a form of social permaculture.

THE NARRATIVE OF POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

In this chapter my intention is not to create a comprehensive account of participatory approaches, nor an overview of art in/with/within permaculture, but to highlight two art practices that shaped my thinking and motivated the initiation of this research. Therefore, the introduction of the Chilean/North American artist Alfredo Jaar's impact on my practice is unavoidable, likewise the exposition of the inspiring (permaculture) methods in the activism of the British Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination (LABOFII). Jaar inspired my interest towards the essential value of context and local narratives in public projects, while LABOFII provided me with a precedent for adapting the methods and philosophy of permaculture in free and graceful ways that still manage to retain a charged form of activism.

'Artists create models of thinking' (Jaar 2012)

The New York based artist and teacher, Alfredo Jaar, calls his working method 'public intervention'. And when Jaar is invited to create new work, he requests the minimum of a yearlong research period in which to incubate and observe, in a manner akin to the pre- and re-observational phases of permaculture. In describing this process, Jaar states:

I do not act before reaching a certain critical mass of information. The objective is to discover what I call the essence of a place. Only at that moment I start formulating ideas. (Jaar 2012)

Jaar uses his observation time to gain the situated information necessary for a customised work plan and design. And whilst 'the idea' for an eventual artwork can come spontaneously for him, the project realization requires management of technical and logistic issues, permissions and final deadlines. In some public projects an artist's process can become more important than the final 'work'. Not so for Jaar, whose process is necessary, but whose work he wishes to stand alone. Jaar's work reveals a poetic vein within the aesthetic he seeks to realize. Coming from a background in architecture, many of his works involve infrastructural elements constructed for pragmatic functions that are also, however, a visual manifestation of declarative social values.

One of Jaar's most complex projects was the *Public Project for Public Safety, The Skoghall Konsthall, 2000*. This was a project, which, alongside public management issues, drew upon contact with local artists and organised public workshops. Skoghall is a small regional and developing industrial town in Sweden which, prior to 2000, self-identified as 'the town of the paper-mill'. However, the Skoghall City Council was seeking an identity change. They wanted to represent their town not only as an industrial centre, but as a progressive and modern cultural centre too, and so invited Jaar to collaborate. After his research period Jaar made a proposal. He saw Skoghall as a space of industrial history, private infrastructure and other institutions, but devoid any historically dedicated space for creative culture. So he proposed designing and building the first modern gallery space in Skoghall.

The idea was accepted and, with Jaar's encouragement, funded by the directors of the paper mill. The final design reflected the local environment and Swedish architectural sensibilities. Local architects, builders and craftspeople participated in the build, using local materials, timber forms and paper. The gallery officially opened with a public exhibition event. Local artists created paper-based works, and the people of Skoghall were publically invited. And then, twenty-four hours later, the gallery was deliberately burned to the ground by Jaar himself.

The infrastructure was an ephemeral work where the burn was announced in advance, and supervised by the local fire brigade, but it still astonished the gathered public crowd. Even though key stakeholders were aware that the burning was part of the original conceptual design, there were many who sought to convince him to let the structure remain. But Jaar was adamant. As with the ephemeral creative existence of the structure, he sought to render dramatically visible the mourned absence and locally lived significance of art. The concept was hence of offering people both the gift of art, and the experience of mourning its loss:

So in the end we burned it, because the logic of the project was to offer the community just a glimpse of what contemporary art is and once they had it, to

take it away.... Seven years later they invited me back, as an architect, not as an artist, to design a permanent Kunsthalle for Skoghall, which will open in 2013. (Jaar 2010)

Unsurprisingly, there were many people shocked by Jaar's audacity, and some who felt that his concept danced along a knife-edge between evocative drama and something less than ethical. But the intervention as provocation was undoubtedly effective, and it specifically sought a wider ethical objective via this act of giving, only to take away. The final burning scene ultimately held all the spectacle of an Italian opera: offering a somewhat scandalous theatrical aggrandisement of the possibilities of a larger life. The experience has been described by some witnesses as poignant and liberating.



Figure 2: Alfredo Jaar, *The Skoghall Konsthall*, 2000, public intervention, Skoghall, Sweden, digital image. Photo by Alfredo Jaar.

In public interviews, Alfredo Jaar talks about the need for artists to be deeply aware of their fundamental ethical relationship with their public intervention audience, and considers such work as political. 'Art' disavowing this 'political' description, he claims,

is merely decorative. This commitment to the inherently political nature of art is shared by the group working as the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination.

The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination (LABOFII) was founded by activist artists in 2004 during the European Social Forum in London. They were motivated to collaborate because of a dissatisfaction with traditional leftist movements which they saw to be excessively hierarchical, manipulative, and lacking in transparency. The founders did not produce representative art in such forms as film or exhibitions. Nor did they establish theoretically discursive forums. Instead, believing that facts and figures don't motivate people as much as imaginative visions do, they sought to make radically inspiring collaborative art that strove for political change directly. So bringing together artists who wish to escape the normative representational confines of the art world, LABOFII aspired to work together without hierarchy, engage audiences in political participatory experiments, and find innovative ways to engage sustainability. As Lars Kwakkenbos writes:

[The] Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination exists somewhere between art and activism, poetry and politics. The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination is not an institution or a group, not a network nor an NGO, but an affinity of friends who recognize the beauty of collective creative disobedience. It treats insurrection as an art, and art as a means of preparing for the coming insurrection. (Kwakkenbos 2011, p. 299)

While process is frequently prioritised over the aesthetic outcomes in community art, for LABOFII 'social relations have [...] aesthetics that are important too' (Kwakkenbos 2011, p. 305). As they saw it, aesthetics serves a vital political function by encouraging a broader public to take ownership of activist outcomes as an artwork; engendering greater project pride within creative participants; and by sustaining interest in public projects over a longer term. So LABOFII sought to generate exciting participatory 'experiments', with strong aesthetic elements to maximise their collaborative and political effect.



Figure 3: LABOFII, *Put the fun between your legs, become the Bike Bloc!*, 2009, experiment, Candy Factory, Copenhagen, digital image.

One such well-known LABOFII open process ‘experiment’ was called *Bike Bloc*, which was designed for the UN climate summit in Copenhagen. The idea of *Bike Bloc* was to use the thousands of bicycles abandoned around Copenhagen every year, as sculptural materials of reinvention where open multitudes of volunteers could come and create ‘hybrid’ bicycles and other sculptural objects to create an effective blockade—in order to protect environmentally concerned political forums from being closed down by police. Their original plan for this experiment had been to collaborate with the *Arnolfini*, in Bristol, and the *Centre of Contemporary Art* in Copenhagen. But whilst the art center sought to present a platform for political critique, the curators had concerns about its position of conflicted interests when it came to the institution supporting a direct political action, especially one that involved civil disobedience actions in the forms of civil law breaking. In an iterative response, LABOFII held civil disobedience trainings that were run by consensus, in public spaces of Copenhagen. And participants there first created a non-violent barricade of bicycles against incoming police. Then, under the slogan ‘Put the fun between your legs, become the Bike Bloc!’,

LABOFII attracted hundreds of willing volunteers to the new experimental Candy Factory headquarters. The space, which was effectively a squat which was turned into a bike repair space where artists, engineers, activists and bike hackers could come together to design and build new tools of civil disobedience.

The new creatively graffiti-covered ‘social centre’ turned out to better serve the spirit and the aims of the project than the original intuitional setting would have. In anticipation of the police and local authorities casting their civil disobedience training as a threatening form of violence, LABOFII’s explicit objective was to undertake only aesthetically innovative and non-violent actions. As members put it: ‘the bike block is fundamentally about making rebel friendship’ (LABOFII 2009b).

CONCLUDING NARRATIVE PRAXIS – PROPOSING SOLUTIONS

Upon personal reflection, I have a recurring need to integrate a practice of joy into my work. The setting is often within grass roots, informal performative functions in which I can situate by creating my own ‘artistic landscape’; and achieve the authentic, holistic social practice that I am looking for. Like Galeta, who orchestrated performances based upon his intuitive-spontaneous flow of interconnected interests, I also need to weave my own abilities and interests into threads within the social ecology: in ways that ‘cultivate’ narrative engagements between people. These narrative mediums that suit me best then, are also those that help me nurture cultural engagements as social permaculture.

The immersive research process of Alfredo Jaar also influenced me: as did his poetics, and his determination to engage politics directly within his art practice. Jaar does not only *justify* the political within his art; but has the audacity to claim that if art is *not* political, it is just ‘decoration’. The immersive process of actually ‘just doing what local people do’ is now helped along by the legitimizing precedents set by his successful project history. By having built a portfolio of qualitative case studies with fantastical

results, potential ‘patrons’ can more easily envision what the outcomes of such a practice, and such a long observation period, might look like. I can attest to the fact that the experience of such a prolonged state of ‘pre-definition’ is a vulnerable one; especially when there are commitments to communicate and produce through this period, which are not voluntary. Like Jaar, I have also wanted to produce precedents of qualitative research to help future practitioners: and the transparency of my thoughts and chosen research processes, could also be said to be a form of political action, which is at least in part inspired by Jaar. And finally, whilst resolving the *MugWall Social Café* (Chapter 5), his work also prompted my consciousness of what it might mean to create a work that is later taken away – as well as the consolidating impacts such work can have upon a community: by means of collaborative engagement, and well opportunities to connect with and display work by other local artists and practitioners.

With LABOFII, I was inspired by their energizing take upon the political. By proposing it is necessary to generate visions of hope, LABOFII argue that utopian dreaming is pragmatic. Their projects work as catalysing calls for innovations in civil disobedience, based in skill sharing. This approach is important to LABOFII and social permaculture alike, including cultural development as a skill, as needed for revitalising community. As with permaculture, consensus making is crucial to participants becoming receptive to cooperative learning practices, and to these ends I found the concept of a purposive aesthetics—both creatively and socially—appealing and useful. The vision statement work (in Chapter 5) was an attempt to aesthetically integrate the concepts of perspective diversity as an asset, with the pragmatism of a future vision inspired by permaculture design. And finally, in calling their projects ‘experiments’, LABOFII reserved the means to retain an open creative process, which frees up practice from the tendency to predefinition. I found this purposive nomenclature useful when it came to commencing my own ‘pilot projects’ as described in the following section.

SECTION 2 – Pilot projects – The Experimental Narrative

Iterative experiments, in the form of pilot projects, began the field-based practice behind this research. They were a way to dip my toes into new waters, and they served as an entry point into the formation of new knowledge, in a new place. I wanted to test the proposition that Joseph Beuys put forward, that: ‘the material of art is the society itself, which is not an abstract entity but an art form – in constant flux – and capable of being "sculpted"' (Luckenbach 2003).

And, whilst social engagement was not new to my practice, what made this new was the addition of permaculture. I wanted the material of my art to be akin to a garden being cultivated, and to find ways to test how ‘community’ might be perma-culturally sculpted. As Helguera (2011) stated, achieving this ‘requires a new set of skills and knowledge’ that supports my (reskilled) practice. For me, knowledge about permaculture came from a combination of texts, undertaking a permaculture design

certificate, and getting my hands into the earth to give it a try. Likewise, to develop my practical skills in social permaculture, I embraced the lived reality of a liminal migratory experience, and sought creative affinities with gardeners, environmentalists and institutionally affiliated audiences, with each of whom I could generate empathic moments of community—based in transience, permaculture principles of earthen and people care, and active forums that variously ideologically identify with the creative pursuit of sustainable environmental and social ecologies.

This SECTION 2 then continues to recount personally situating narratives, as applied now to an indicative sampling of pilot experiments. This section begins with a reflection on migration, and on into initial integrative forays into the Tasmanian institutional arts and environmental contexts.

EMBRACING THE LIMINAL EXPERIENCE

Leaving Hungary (Winter 2012)

It was December, in 2012, and one of the coldest European winters of recent history. And as a family in Hungary, we were living a liminal existence. Juggling with freelance performances to pay the rent, we were getting by with a broken-down car and the help of others. The political situation was also grim, and felt like a steady drift towards soft dictatorship. Our envisaged solution, whilst not ideal, was to move—as far away as possible. I applied to study at the University of Tasmania in Australia, with very little conception of whether or not I would be accepted. When I was, the visa process was another uncertain one. But somehow, within a fourteen-day timeframe over Christmas, this was all achieved, and we found ourselves packing boxes, selling assets, and preparing ourselves as best we could to become as stateless strangers in a new country.

I remember the word ‘liminal’ swirling around in my mind, alongside several synonyms. Threshold. Borderline. Edge: that sounds better. As the eleventh principle of permaculture proposes: ‘Use edges, and value the marginal’. And that became our mainstay plan for the following few years. Operating at the marginal, we found a stable space within liminal experience. The edge can be seen as a place to rest awhile, and has been a space to explore utopian imaginings about the potential roles of art in society.

A friend once called me a ‘trickster’, and made the comparison between my approach to art and the role of Hermes in Greek mythology. This was to be a prescient remark, which carried with me. And Agnes Horvath draws upon an analogy with Hermes to enter into the conceptual realm of liminality when she writes:

In a liminal space everything is permitted and everything is oppressed; it is a ground of weakness, a zero between two borderlines, a rupture of the previously taken-for-granted order, an emptiness that invades both life and death. During a period of liminality one is in between two borderlines, with sex, age, professional qualifications, or social status being indefinable. (Horvath 2009, p. 54)

We were seeking not only a better life, but also a space of freedom in which to make art with joy, and other people. And so we sought borders to stay between. In re-reading the immigration documents, Galeta's poetic words come to mind:

If there is frame, then there is time too. No frame, no time. Therefore, we have two alternatives. Enter and exit. And what matters is when you are at the border, neither in nor out. I think, in that point freedom cometh. (Nagy 2015, p. 124)

Time and space compressed in that two weeks, and framed imagination, until we landed on the other side of earth. All we had left was to value the marginal as permaculture suggests. In Tasmania we have had to create new frames. And a framework in which to create the new frames of a new family life. If new frames newly delineate time, these first framings might be called pilot projects. It was December, in 2012. And shovelling through 20cm of fresh snow, I could feel the marginal.

SAMPLE PILOT PROJECTS

GREAT WESTERN TEARS, NO. 1.

Collaborative project, performance, installation

Art Trail – Jackeys Marsh Forest Festival, Great Western Tiers, Tasmania (24–27 January 2014)

Coordinator: Sam Beckman

Jackeys Marsh has been a symbolic region within the Great Western Tiers since the early days of Australian environmentalism. Like the Franklin River campaign, or the efforts to preserve the forests of the Tarkine and the Huon, the Great Western Tiers region was supported by thousands of activists who not only established new and non-violent ways to campaign, but also contributed to the formation of the world's first Green political party, the United Tasmania Group (UTG) in 1972.

At the Jackeys Marsh Forest Festival in January 2014, forest supporters were celebrating the World Heritage Declaration of the Great Western Tiers. As part of the festival, artists were asked to create contextual works that responded to this announcement, to create a festival Art Trail.



Figure 4: Tamas Oszvald, *Great Western Tears, No. 1.*, collaborative project, performance, installation, 2014, digital image. Photograph by Linda

Linda and I performed under the name of the Theatre of Roaming Trees. And performance tied in with a platform for reflective dialogue, informed by a historical context of ecological art and activism. The festival was an occasion for appreciative reflection upon many years of environmental struggle. So we set up a simple tent shelter and asked people to join in on a written discussion, recording their gratitude for collective efforts, or future environmental wishes on pieces of cotton ribbon. As performers, we wanted to celebrate and entertain by dressing up in costumes, roaming the bush drumming, and up on our stilts, hanging the collected gratitude ribbons upon the highest branches we could reach up to in the trees. Later, we recollected the ribbons and sewed them together using a hand-powered machine. The cotton strands were then all twisted together to make strong rope. Festival participants held the hundred-metre-long strands together, keeping them taut whilst we made the rope. So we were all twisting rope together to celebrate preservation under the summer sun.

GREAT WESTERN TEARS, NO. 2.

Installation and intervention

Tasmanian Landscape exhibition – Academy Gallery (6 February-14 March 2014)

Curator: Malcom Bywaters

In response to an invitation to exhibit at the *Tasmanian Landscape* exhibition, I created an installation from elements that came from the Great Western Tiers festival. It was a combination of the rope twisted together from participants' notes of gratitude, and some film work taken of the event. While the show was still in progress, however, the Australian government declared their intention to remove some areas of old growth forest from the World Heritage list. This had never happened before in the history of the UNESCO World Heritage movement. For the purposes of short-term economic gain, the Australian government wanted to reserve the means to fell forest to make woodchips for the Japanese market.

So the project that began within the context of commemorative celebration evolved to reflect a site of protest against eco-violence. I began filming the protest onsite and replaced the original installation film with the developing real-time scene of protest. And I twisted the rope into a hangman's noose. It was mounted alongside local headlines that featured the government decision.



Figure 5: Tamas Oszvald, *Great Western Tears, No. 2.*, installation and intervention, 2014, digital image. Photograph by Tamas Oszvald.

STORIES DROPPED DOWN FROM THE SKY, NO. 1.

Collaborative project and installation

Threads of Launceston exhibition – NEW Gallery (21 March–2 May 2014)

Curator: Malcom Bywaters

‘Stories Dropped Down from the Sky’ was a project created for the Launceston Harmony Day celebration, and the *Threads of Launceston* art exhibition, which aimed to bring together diverse cultural threads from local migrant communities. The work was a collage, a medium I often turn to when working with people of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds—because they are simple to produce, result in stimulating outcomes, and help overcome any communication differences incumbent with diverse participant language and cultural histories.

In Hungary, we had a great children’s television program that was called *Stories Dropped Down from the Sky* to which children could send in their own drawings. A children’s book author, a storyteller and a musician would then work on the drawings, selecting characters from amongst the pictures, cutting them out, and acting out stories with the drawn characters as puppetry. The stories were very simple, and sweet, and accompanied by song. I respectfully borrowed the title and technique from this program.



Figure 6: Tamas Oszvald, *Stories Dropped Down From The Sky, No. 1.*, collaborative project and installation, 2014, digital image. Photograph by Tamas Oszvald.

With the support of the local Migrant Resource Centre, the *Threads of Launceston* project focused on the imagination of recently migrated children and the fantastic world they can create in their dreams and stories. I asked the children to send us drawings of people and the things around them in their new home. Then, on Harmony Day, after scanning and reprinting the drawings, the children and staff created one large shared picture-scene from the cut-out characters and objects that the children had drawn. And so a person from one drawing started dancing with a figure from another drawing, in front of a house that came from a different drawing again.

HOME LANDING / STORIES DROPPED DOWN FROM THE SKY, NO. 2.

Collaborative project

Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery (October 2014)

As an Art Education Officer at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery (QVMAG), I initiated collaboration between QVMAG and the neighbouring TasTAFE institute, Tasmania's largest public sector provider of vocational education and training.

The TAFE was running a program called the Youth Adult Migrant English Program (YAMEP) which was a government funded initiative designed to help people newly immigrated to Australia to easily adapt to Australian society, culture and conversational language.



Figure 7: Tamas Oszvald, *Home Landing / Stories Dropped Down From The Sky, No. 2.*, collaborative project, 2014, digital image. Photograph by Tamas Oszvald.

Within the Home Landing project, students from the YAMEP program were invited into the gallery to share their personal stories about migration. With assistance from QVMAG's gallery guides, the stories were shared against a background of early settlement imagery from the QVMAG collection, and comparisons were made between the students' stories of recent immigration, and early Australian settlement. After the exchange of migration stories, gallery staff helped to facilitate a creative art-making process with the students. The students had been asked to bring along images, from online or magazine sources, of the people, traditions or landscapes of the country from which they had come. The prints were used to make one large, collective collage as a basis for students to share their stories and feelings with one another about making a new home in Tasmania.

CONCLUDING EXPERIMENTS

Within every permutation my practice has taken to date, I have always seen the making of art, through formal and immaterial processes alike, to be a means of bringing an audience to new modes of seeing the world. My practice, as I have experienced it, has been a type of teaching in which I introduce people to alternative situations, questions and ways of perceiving the world. The learning experience happens equally for me as the artist too: partly invented, partly observed situations lead me as an artist to re-examine my assumptions, methods and would-be models, marking experimental pilot project practices as two-way growth events.

The pilot projects for this research sampled here were informed by personal and cultural engagements with liminal experience, and radical moments of change. And transition was to remain a vital energy within my research. From the initial conception of seeing the edge phenomena and the liminal as a part of social permaculture, I learned to cultivate empathic means to generate ephemeral engagement moments. These temporary experiences drew upon my affinity with both narrative performance and teaching, and came to both provide a means to culturally situate in Lorinna as my final research community, and to reflect upon how to transition the experience into a more fully embedded role of engagement within everyday community life.

The hermetic role as interpreted as a ‘trickster’—as observed in the part one liminal reflection— was also to become a recurring theme to resolve within my work. Larger and more highly performative roles make great social segues into accepted subcultural engagement, but the temptation to make high-energy, short-duration bombastic entertainment needs to be overcome in order for ‘small and slow solutions’ to have space in which to operate. The hermetic role then becomes one of engaging the transition and recognising the mature growth of the artist necessary to mediate for the flourishing of deeper community relationships.

SECTION 3 – Social Permaculture As Engagement – The Definitional Narrative

The ingredients for social engagement are simple: requiring an artist, participants, the conceptual and practical means of engagement, and a platform or authority with which to operate. The complexities emerge however through the interactions between these ingredients and the permutations of possible practice evolve rapidly. Within this Section, I seek to navigate the academic narrative and to situate the role of the artist, the meanings of community, and my own personal socially engaged practice within the broader fields of the literature, which has most, informed my research.

INGREDIENTS FOR SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

In many disciplines, researchers can investigate, refine or amend their practice without first having to define and justify their broader roles within society. Not so with socially based art, however, and for legitimate reasons. As Tania Brugera stated once in an interview, social practice is an art form ‘...that doesn’t operate as a formal gesture. Formalism comes with the process of thinking you already understand, so you stop researching’ (Morrill 2015, p. 67).

The questions: ‘what is (the) art?’ and ‘what is the role of the artist?’ sound too broad and difficult to answer, even as they reliably recur together—and with particular regularity—around non-traditional mediums. Yet the question ‘what is the role of the artist?’ is uninterpretable without first locating it within the environment in which the artist operates. Becoming ever more specific about the environment, the outcomes, and the practitioner in question are necessary steps towards a meaningful answer. But both questions are never complete however—on account of the inherent contextual refinements—and so need revisiting whenever a sufficiently new project in a new ‘community’ arises (see Chapter 4). According to my own concluded and generalised experience, a community is:

A group of people living in the same place or having a common characteristic, or a common interest, sharing or having certain attitudes, or practising common ownership. One or some of these criteria or even all of them converge people to community.

But this rather dry and vacuous definition does not explain the evocative nature or potential of the word within an engagement practice. The concept of ‘community’ is hard to discuss without deep emotional attachment. The desire to belong to a strong and supportive community is an apparent and recurring desire throughout history as what was initially perhaps attributable to survival (Csányi 1989) and later to a higher quality of life and (more practically) secure existence (Kropotkin 1902) has more recently evolved into explicit notions of shared values and lifestyle preferences.

In Kropotkin’s (1902) theory of Mutual Aid, Kropotkin sought evolutionary evidence for the basis of human social collaboration. He denied that emotions, family and personal sympathies accounted for the sum total of social instincts, arguing instead that there was a much more difficult to expound force at work, in the form of a broader and species-wide solidarity. Along similar lines, Miwon Kwon (2002) proposes that a community is a ‘formation that... is not a ‘common being’, but a nonessential ‘being-in-common’. Peck (1987) points out that one of the main characteristics to describe community is ‘communication’—and so is against the idea of using the word for any collection of individuals, regardless of their level of communication. Peck describes the three pillars of a community to be: inclusivity, commitment and consensus. Being inclusive is a must, he suggests, but this is a quality, which occurs within parameters that are never absolute. To clarify this role of inclusion in defining a community, he cites a friend who was said to say that a community is: ‘a group of

people who have learned to transcend their individual differences' (Peck 1987, p. 62). The word 'transcend' in Peck's cited definition here particularly resonates with me as this term comes from Latin, meaning 'climb over'. This climbing over of a type of threshold, liminal space or, as permaculture would describe it, 'edge phenomena', also entails a sense of the dynamics of how people get there.

Desire for community, and to better know the principles that bring it about, is frequently expressed in a broad range of literature, with utopian undertones. As Peck suggests—as measured by his own high standards of 'real' community—a living example of (a real) 'community is rare'.

At first glance Lorinna seemed to be one of those rare examples. As a geographic locale, it is bounded by the steep river-following roadside walls that provide entrance to a remote river valley, and the political boundaries as governed by the Kentish Council in rural Tasmania. This was the location of my primary fieldwork practice. The valley shares proximity and similarities in topography with nearby Cradle Mountain (For a detailed map see Appendix 6).

I have created a diagram to illustrate the dynamic of the local people as experienced during my stay and from the point of the projects I ran in Lorinna.

The outer circle on the picture indicates the 'People of Tasmania'. Although Tasmania's active relation with the main land and globally is significant, the island itself retains a special dynamic. As my personal experience, Tasmanians are mostly

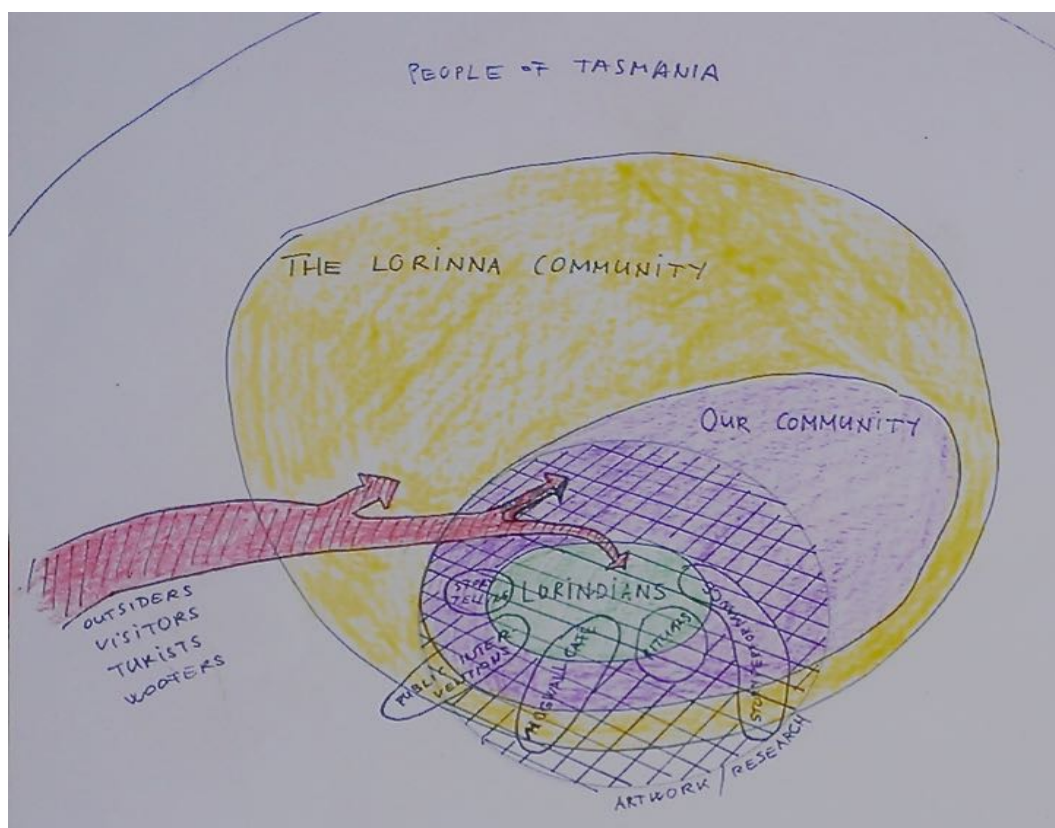


Figure 8: Tamas Oszvald, *The dynamics of Lorinna*, 2016, computer image.

proud of living in an island state, where people who share the same profession, interests or provenance keep track of each other. The next circle (yellow) marks 'The Lorinna Community'. This label simply means everybody who lives in this location. It includes approximately thirty households that in total house around one hundred people. The purple circle is labelled as 'Our Community', the group I identify within my practice includes the actively communicating local participants who regularly interact amongst one another, in part for reasons of mutual aid. The innermost green circle bears the legendary-sounding phrase 'Lorindians'. It refers to those local community participants who identify with an actively engaged vision of Lorinna as an emotive space of belonging, consciously cooperative value choices, and daily reciprocity, including for instance home-teaching arrangements and childcare in a form akin to extended familial arrangements. Lorindians is a name such participants give themselves.

The inward pursuing red arrow shows the regular flow of strangers to Lorinna as such as visitors, tourists and WOOFERs. This original drawing was created at an early stage of the fieldwork. With the width of the arrows' different sections my intention was to illustrate the pro rata quantity of inflowing people (wider arrow = more people), but on further investigation these quantities were reversed. Instead of having the least traffic with the wider community outside Lorinna, the Lorindians host at least 2/3 of the woofers and visitors. These outsiders are (although just temporarily) actively involved in keeping the borders of this sub-group continuously plastic.

The square-gird overlapping layer is intended to show the research (as) artwork. As indicated in the diagram, all Lorindians were part of the research, and also most of Our Community members too. However just a small segment of the Lorinna Community was actively involved.

The last layer that needs to unfold includes the five different projects/approaches, named as Storytelling, Public Interventions, MugWall Café, Rituals and Story Performances. Their location indicates the people who were concerned/activated/targeted by them across the four areas. The intimacy of the storytelling and ritual actions puts them in the very middle zones, while public interventions spread out equally to all areas. The MugWall Café had some slight and unexpected effects on external people and a predictable involvement with the green and the purple coloured groups. But it surprisingly affected a few of those who did not identify as part of Our Community and the Lorindians.

This diagram is a static drawing, but it should be an animated moving image where the outsiders' arrows, the layer of the research and the projects would all move. Similarly, the base layers of the diagram, the distinctions amongst the layers of community, are also more amorphous than neatly categorical in practice but do reveal overlapping and lived aspects of core-shared meanings. Within my practice though, I needed to take ethical care with such terms so as not to inadvertently use them in ways which might exclude people. And community cannot be strictly defined by activity level either, as some residents embrace participation through more abstract common values. The

nuances of such values really required my physical relocation to Lorinna, to better see how they operate.

In fact, living within location was definitely necessary to practice in many ways: to become an accepted member of the community as the community describes, to participate in life as an authentically lived form of experiential knowledge, and to engage interdependently, and so understand more fully what community means in a local sense. However, my status as a community member was also a liminal one: within Australia with my family here on a temporary visa status, and within the community where people know we would leave their lives. This form of existence is an insecure one, but at the same time strengthens our ability to accept change.

THE NARRATIVE OF THE 'FIELD OF PRACTICE'

In order for a social practice to be able to happen, artists most obviously need people willing to become participants. This can come about by either chance or choice. As a deliberate choice, an artist can organise to work with a certain group of people, either independently or by various forms of institutional matchmaking, whilst the will to participate generally needs to remain voluntary.

Approaching social engagement within the definitional narrative results in a list of related terms within the field which can seem endlessly sub-categorical, with examples including: participatory art, activist art, public art, community art, community-engaged art, community-based art, socially engaged art, social practice, dialogical practice, relational practice, arts for social justice, artist and community collaboration, applied aesthetics, and community cultural development. I rely here on four different sources: the writings of Pablo Helguera (2011), Marnie Badham (2010), Grant Kester (2015) and Anthony Schrag (2013).

Marnie Badham points to changes within the language used by federal agencies as a form of evidence for the formal recognition of such categories, pointing out that 'distinctions are made between art *for*, *by* and *with* community' by the Australia Council for example (Badham 2010, p. 87). Art *within community* could be added to these distinctions, to include the likes of a static gesture, for instance a historical monument, or a non-art object such as the reinvention of an existing building for a new purpose—or the 1956 destruction of monuments to Stalin in Hungary—where both examples also generated participatory actions.

Another difference between types of practice is between work that is (community-) *based* or (community-) *engaged*. The former emphasises location as an external influence on the practice, whilst the latter is 'signifying an engagement *with* from an external body' (Schrag 2013). And I could add here that besides these two grammatically passive voices, an emphasis on *practice* is also a distinguishing feature that highlights an attitude about how artists relate to their art-making. The word *practice* (as an activity) can replace *art* (as an outcome) as with social practice, dialogical practice, or relational practice. And there are bound to be further categorical

differences to be found. But ultimately, the context is what decides which label, or combination of labels, fits best.

Not all practitioners abide by the necessity of identifying neatly categorical terms for creating a meaningful practice (Diamond 2015). In fact, some become outright exasperated by the nature of many forums of theoretical discussion (Kester 2015). Kester argues, for instance, against the concept of a *best name*, due to a tendency to homogenise practice (2015), and he further questions the necessity of formalising terms at all. He argues that such systematisation is an adaptation of institutional stakeholders, keen to locate the new genre within an existing system. Before we label ourselves as artists, Kester proposes that we ask the question: ‘does... [the labelling]... entail a more profound re-ordering of the discursive system that underlies most existing modes of artistic production?’ (Kester 2015, p. 347).

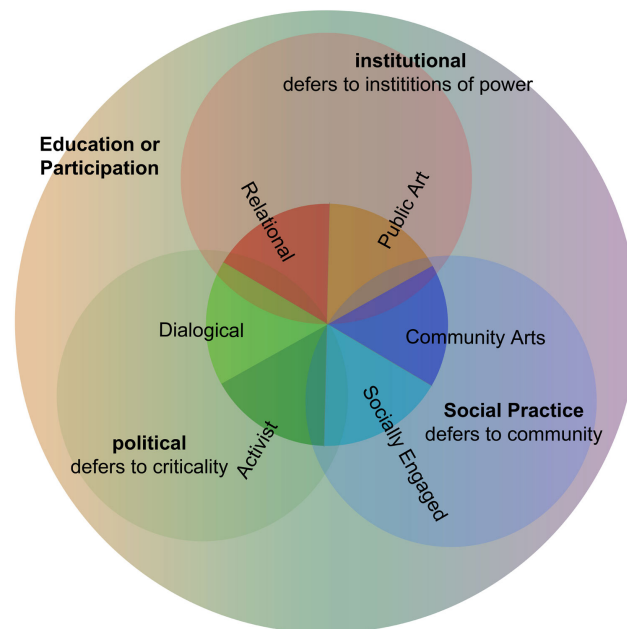


Figure 9: Anthony Schrag, *Participatory practice diagram*, 2015, computer image (Schrag 2016).

Schrag rejects ‘the lack of clarity that comes when these terms are used interchangeably’ (2013) and has created an overlapping Venn diagram in an attempt to rectify this. And, via diagramming, he seeks to integrate the need for clarity with the need to avoid the tendency of narrowing down available terms into an over-simplified formal practice. Within his diagram, Schrag selected six primary terms that he pairs together by the nature of an artist’s intention, and then places these within what he identifies as their overarching domain. By a domain, he means ‘*that which gives the work its meaning; the frame through which the work’s presence in this world is justified*’ (Schrag 2013, *italics in original*). There are three domains presented in overlapping spheres: the institutional, the political and the social practice sphere. When Schrag places participation over the diagram he pairs it with education and explains their relation as ‘These two exist in constant tension, and are the very fabric of

the question of intent when working with people: does an artist/institution/community want to engage in a ‘participatory’ project or and ‘education’ project?’ (Schrag 2013). He sees education as a tool of assimilation, an institutionally mastered annexation of the outsiders into the formalised system. As I do, Schrag acknowledges that the spheres of education and participation are often overlapped and interwoven. My museum projects—whatever else I envisioned—were more educational than participatory therefore their intent was a ‘form of social engineering to ‘*construct civic identities*’ amenable to the state’ (Schrag 2013, *italics in original*).

Schrag’s diagram sees my work identified as *social engagement*, which (as evidenced by pilot projects) is located across the intersections of both community arts and activism. Borrowing from Schrag’s diagram (Schrag 2013), I sought to clarify his labels in the following table.

PARTICIPATORY PRACTICE						
SPHERES	Institutional practice		Political practice		Social practice	
SUB-GENRE	Relational practice	Public art	Activist art	Dialogical practice	Socially-engaged art	Community art
DESCRIPTION	Based within the (conceptual/physical) structures of art institutions, but that sought new ways of engaging with publics other than with object-based works. The events are primarily structural and/or events-based, and primarily within institutional frameworks.	Works that are funded or approved by public bodies, usually sculptural or formal, that iterate a public concern and/or interest and primarily results in objects placed in public spaces.	Aligned with leftist politics and dedicated to the betterment of participants via a critique of oppressive (capitalist) regimes, with a primary concern being direct intervention into power structures and is primarily event-based.	Concerned with the ethics of working with a public that is not an ‘art audience’. It assumes the power structures to be more egalitarian between the artist and the participant, where both can be influenced by the other. It often results in both gallery-based and in public spaces.	Aligned with social betterment, commitment to community change and development via (political) consciousness raising, concerned with the systems that sustain community oppression. It often results in public events authored by the artist, in collaboration with participants.	Artist working in collaboration with communities, usually in a disadvantaged state (poverty, substance abuse etc.). It often results in community-based and community-constructed objects – i.e., murals/mosaics.
DEFER TO	Institutions of power		Criticality		The community and their needs and desires	
INTENT OF THE WORK IS TO	Recapitulate and reinforce that power, either of the public institution (i.e., local government) or to the institution of art (museum/gallery)		Critique the politics that sustain oppression		Sustain a status quo – and defer to the construction of – community	
THE GENERAL MOOD OF THESE WORKS	Deferential		Politically charged		Convivial	

Figure 9: Tamas Oszvald, *Participatory practice detailed table*, 2016, computer image.

Schrag includes an additional term that he cannot situate within the diagram as it ‘can occur across the different spheres, and specifically at the intersections of the different forms of practice’ (Schrag 2013). He calls this approach *agonistic* or *conflictual participatory practice*. Schrag describes this as a critical approach to power that:

...frames itself via dialogic disensus (as opposed to consensus) in order to reveal the intent of a project first and foremost, both as content of the work but also in its mode of participation. (Schrag 2013)

Pablo Helguera describes this approach as *antisocial* or *antagonistic social action*. His opinion differs from Schrag’s as he says ‘antagonism is not a genre but rather a quality of art-making that is simply more exacerbated in some practices than in others’ (Helguera 2011, p. 59). However it is termed, one key difference within agonistic (or antagonistic) practice is the deviation from voluntary participation, as exemplified by the works for instance of Alfredo Jaar. In Jaar’s practice, neither the participants nor the act of participation is spelt out in advance, relying instead upon happenings that utilise elements of confrontation.

Having once drawn more frequently upon antagonistic techniques, I find it useful to the project of redefinition to reflect upon my reasons for change. I still find importance in criticism and disruption as a technique of art that ‘contributes to social change by disturbing our relationship to our present social conditions’ (Spiers 2015, p. 145). But contextually, I have also come to agree with Helguera’s proposition that ‘in some ways a confrontational artwork is easier to orchestrate than one that requires many hours of negotiation, consensus building, and collaboration with a community’ (Helguera 2011, p. 60). And furthermore, within my role as a cultural-service-providing engagement artist in Lorinna, criticism of the alternative community I am a part of would simply be counterproductive to the cultivation of already alternative voices. Under the influence of social permaculture in such a community, I have come to experience the departure from confrontational practices as a form of progress, with engagement of broader societal issues also becoming better resolved—albeit on incremental scales—in grass roots forms and on local levels.

From the pilot project experimentations, I think these urges to resituate are a personally creative growth process, where reflections upon any abstracted sense of idealised art are understood within the context of the social ecology. The ‘small and slow solutions’ permaculture challenges me to pursue and offer an alternative challenge and wisdom that offers a counterpoint to more theatrical modes of ‘trickery’—and I am finding that resisting the impulse to perform, on many levels, takes quite some time to embrace. The resistance to rapidity in an accelerating world is also its own kind of political statement: if that can be made productive, it does offer a systemic model for alternative diversity. And whilst my practice is not one that seeks a permanent definition in which to situate, the decision to reserve adaptive capacity within the field is its own finding that comes from the effort to define.

CHAPTER 3 – The Narrative Of Permaculture

As an early stage of synthesis here, I wish to start defining the scope and context of research; the role of the artist as an element of permaculture research ecology; and the parameters of a required research method. This chapter is divided into three core sections that seek to reconcile these objectives. The first two sections offer necessary background and reflection upon the principles of permaculture ethics, and the systemic design principles from which I most wish to draw, respectively. The final section, SECTION 3, begins to define the scope of practical problems in applying such principles of ethics and design to my own social engagement practice.

SECTION 1 – The Ethical Narrative of Permaculture

Three ethical principles underlie permaculture design: captured within the terms earth care, people care and fair share. In general, ‘earth care’ means to care about, and actively protect, the natural environment. More deeply though, the principle proposes that all life forms have their own intrinsic value, and need to be respected for the functions they provide, within the whole. I also interpret this principle to speak of place, and our connection with and consciousness of it. This entails an implicit attitude where we do not rule nature, but rather respectfully coexist within it, accepting our role as beings amongst nature—no more or less than any other form of life in the planetary system.

To realise this mode of existence, we need to connect to ‘place’ not only via human cultural threads, but also via a direct engagement with the natural environment. And furthermore, this holistic relational engagement only works once we can more equally engage both the ‘natural’ and the ‘cultural’ aspects of ‘nature as place’ simultaneously. There are traditional indigenous communities who made no categorical distinction between such connections to place, although I am aware of—and experience—a bias towards the cultural for the most part within industrialised consumer life. I simply propose that this is an example of imbalance that needs to be redressed. To elaborate, I need to refer to the idea of a connection to ‘nature as place’, which has simultaneous local and global parts. What is easier to practice is a connection to local environment. We generally take a bounded and possessive approach to ‘our’ location: mending fence-lines, tending weeds and so on. But locality is by no means distinct in nature. Seeds, plants, falling leaves and birds, for instance, don’t know or respect human boundary lines. They move freely across our protected pseudo localities. And our efforts, which nurture or destroy, do likewise. As worms from rich soils can move to neighbouring yards, so too travel herbicides. The local impact of our actions can be more readily observed, but further impacts occur regardless, and our actions can be said to sit within a more global ethical system. A perma-‘cultural’ mindset in this way makes no distinction between ‘natural’ and ‘cultural’, or between ‘local’ and ‘global’.

From the point of my research, these ethics need to be integral to both my creative practice and general mindset. As Mollison suggests: ‘the most destructive influence on all ecologies [is]: the unthinking appetite of people – appetite for energy, newspaper, wrappings, “art”, and “recreation”’ (Mollison 1988, p. 57). There is not yet a ‘zero pollution’ way to live or make art, but our processes can reflect limited-resource consciousness in various ways.

The Croatian artist, Ivan Ladislav Galeta, inspired my early attempts in this direction with his ‘non-art art’ practice which manifested in, for example, ‘gardening as performance’, and filming natural processes for interpretation (Nagy 2015). In the globalised art world—in the age of biennials and art-related international conferences—flying between continents for career achievement again raises questions about our cultural-ethical development. The role of the frequently travelling contemporary artist is often compared to a kind of new nomadism, as artists go about ‘bestriding the globe like a cultural colossus’ (O’Mahony 2012, p. 96). There is an increasing population of artists who radically connect their practice with an alternative mindset to this: decrying even the use of fuel-based vehicles in favour of riding bikes, or walking instead. One such example is the Artist as Family (Jones 2013) initiative. Personally, I use a car to maintain our remote rural life. We do however make every effort to minimise our impact via car sharing, and walking locally, whenever possible.

‘People care’ simply means that people should endeavour to look after themselves and each other by cultivating, for example, good health and well-being, learning, social communion and respecting differences. Holmgren explains this ethic as based in the need people have for companionship, and to collaborate in meaningful change (Holmgren 2010). ‘People care’ also begins with ourselves—and then expands to include our families, neighbours and wider communities. The challenge is to grow through self-reliance and personal responsibility. Self-reliance becomes more feasible when we focus on non-material well-being, and taking care of people without excess consumption. In a recent article posted on permaculture ethics, Scott Pittman, founder of the Permaculture Institute, argues that ‘people care’ is not just an economic principle but a social justice concept that inclusively encompasses the enabling of access to health care, housing, meaningful work, education, justice, gender equality, racial equality, and the pursuit of happiness (Pittman 2014).

In my experience, people often expect ‘good community art’ to deal with obviously disadvantaged or marginalised groups. But whilst I don’t seek to devalue artists seeking out such communities, I think there are many deeply empathic goals to which an artist can aspire. Personally, I try to find a social function that is embedded in place. I strive to care alongside those with whom I share everyday life.

‘Fair share’, in simple terms, means to take what you need and share the rest. This ethical proposition focuses on a co-operative, needs-based approach to distributing resources. It looks at how to reduce consumption, and rethink the terms of ‘growth’. Scott Pittman points out that there are interpretive ambiguities associated with the concept of fairness. For this reason, he prefers to be more explicit. Instead of using the

term ‘fair share’, he states specifically: ‘Set limits to consumption and reproduction, and redistribute surplus to the benefit of the Earth and people’ (Pittman 2014). David Holmgren adds that besides the notion of taking based on need and sharing surplus, the principle also acknowledges systemic limits to how much we *can* use or give. And the notion of fairness is one also intended to connote the mutual benefits of giving (Holmgren 2002).

SECTION 2 – Systemically Principled Permaculture

Originally, the systems of permaculture came out of projects in ecological and environmental design and engineering which sought to develop sustainable and self-maintaining agricultural systems modelled upon natural ecosystems (Mollison 1979; Mollison & Holmgren 1978). Permaculture goals then aimed towards the design or redesign of any complex natural environment, where the subjects of design varied from urban gardens to large-scale farming practices. And the pivot point into full holistic practice is still a full (re)design, where every action implemented is subordinated to the needs of the complex systemic whole. This kind of ‘whole system thinking’ is a phenomenon that is growing in popularity, but full implementation is still rare. No doubt this is attributable to the sheer volume and depth of literature available about permaculture, and the pervasive demands upon most practitioners’ time.

Since being published in 1978, permaculture methods have been the subject of empirical investigations (Holmgren 2009; Holmgren 2002) and direct adaptation to other disciplines (Jones 2013; LABOFII 2009; Lebo 2012; Macnamara 2012) including house and land use planning, as well as in business modelling, and other forms of community development. Because permaculture does not have a copyrighted system, systemic elements have also been broadly borrowed for applications in multiple disciplinary contexts. This very adaptability plays an important role in its wide dissemination, and its ‘viral’ influence somewhat resembles the resistant DIY ethic of the open source software movement. As a system, permaculture is grounded in the three ethical principles discussed above as well as twelve key principles of design.

In order to recreate my own practice in order to explore the systemic potential of permaculture as arts engagement research, I also required a more in-depth understanding of the design principles and process as currently practised. I attended a certified permaculture design course, and experienced mentoring through a complex process of garden design. This improved my understanding of the dynamics of the process, and certainly helped define the possible scope and limits of adapting this system to social art practice. Repeated interpretive reflection upon each of the twelve design principles in turn, whilst not numerically applied, is a necessary and ongoing component of the holistic practice of permaculture.

THE TWELVE PERMACULTURE DESIGN PRINCIPLES

According to David Holmgren, permaculture has twelve design principles (Holmgren 2002).

The principles are:

1. Observe and interact; 2. Catch and store energy; 3. Obtain a yield; 4. Apply self-regulation and accept feedback; 5. Use and value renewable resources; 6. Produce no waste; 7. From patterns to details; 8. Integrate rather than segregate; 9. Use small and slow solutions; 10. Use and value diversity; 11. Use edges and value the marginal; 12. Creatively use and respond to change.

Whilst the principles—as described below—are not hierarchical in importance, the first design principle *Observe and interact* is the point of departure for both a successful garden design as well as participatory practice. A core objective of any permaculture design project is to become deeply familiar with context. And for this reason, I go to greater pains in describing this principle than I do the others which follow and, to better reflect the nature and meaning of the systemic approach in practice, have divided this principle into the subcomponents of: 1. (pre)observation, and 2. (re)observation.

Principle 1. – Observe and interact: (Pre)Observation

The main characteristic of (pre)observation is that it has a definable time limit. The goal is to deepen the practitioner's knowledge of the relevant context. Information itself can take almost any form, dependent on the design context in question. The objective is to identify relevant internal and external sources of energy flowing into a system; problems of resource access; and project boundaries. By collecting and evaluating the data found, the (pre)observational phase informs the design and parameters for any intended actions. For instance, in a land design project, earthworks, trees to be planted, or fencing might be decided at this stage. And, in a socially engaged art project, this is when possible participants are identified, formative research is undertaken into community cultural and historical background, and preliminary parameters are identified such as concepts of 'place' and localised 'identity'. Upon commencing engagement with permaculture in design, a yearlong passive observation is suggested in order to gain a full picture of the environment and all of its qualities. When I first encountered Holmgren's principles, his method of yearlong observation reminded me of the practice of Alfredo Jaar who often publically repeats the statement from his manifesto, that 'context is everything' (Jaar 2012). In one of a series of interviews he describes how:

... research takes place in-situ as nothing compares to the real life experience of a place. [...] Most of my projects, and their corresponding research phases, last between two and six years and involve many trips to the area, numerous contacts with local players, and interviews, workshops, and seminars. I read the local press, I watch television, I do whatever locals do. I do not act before

reaching a certain critical mass of information. The objective is to discover what I call the essence of a place. Only at that moment I start formulating ideas. [...] I consider each place unique and each one requires a unique response to its uniqueness. (Jaar 2012)

Principle 1. – Observe and interact: (Re)Observation: ‘Observe *through* interaction’

The word ‘observe’ is derived from the Latin, *observare* that entails a participatory attitude. *Ob* means ‘towards’, and *severe* to ‘attend to’. So combining the parts into *observare* is generally translated as ‘to watch’.

This first principle of ‘observe and interact’ proposes that observation reveals information through interaction. Observation is never passive, and the level of observational interaction can vary immensely. This could involve, for instance, a peaceful contemplation through to more systematic multi-sensory methods or actions. This first principle is reliably referred to as ‘observe *and* interact’; it is also commonly held in the vernacular to mean that observation itself *inherently* works through interaction. As Holmgren states: ‘...there is little value in continuous observation and interpretation unless we interact with the subject of our observations. Interaction reveals new and dynamic aspects to our subject’ (Holmgren 2002, p. 13). So in order to make this more explicit, I modify the wording of this first principle to more clearly read: ‘(Re)observe *through* interaction’ where the prefix ‘re’ refers to the revisitation that occurs throughout the processes of engagement. As with Jaar’s practice, this is definitely not a principle that you can visit only once.

Principle 2. – Catch and store energy

By developing systems that collect resources when they are abundant, we can use them in times of need. (Holmgren 2013a)

For the purposes of my project, I apply this principle primarily to the processes of communal knowledge sharing, where repeated storytelling amongst the community is seen as a form of ‘storage’ in the living memories and recurring associated actions of communal participants.

Principle 3. – Obtain a yield

Ensure that you are getting truly useful rewards as part of the work that you are doing. (Holmgren 2013a)

From this principle, I am reminded to make time to honestly evaluate, periodically reflect upon—and document—outcomes, to celebrate progress at regular intervals, and to share in gratitude all manner of positive experiences that come from the engagement process.

Principle 4. – Apply self-regulation and accept feedback

We need to discourage inappropriate activity to ensure that systems can continue to function well. (Holmgren 2013a)

This principle reminds me to remain open and receptive to constructive feedback and to work honestly with the results of engagement actions. I thus try to humbly accept when things do not go as planned, and engage any results as a feedback process rather than stubbornly insist on the original goal, which might turn out to be counter-productive.

Principle 5. – Use and value renewable resources

Make the best use of nature's abundance to reduce our consumptive behaviour and dependence on non-renewable resources. (Holmgren 2013a)

‘Renewable resources’ here interpretively includes both produce that is organically growing and those which are otherwise freely available in actualised forms. Valuing resources is about injecting vitality into work and life practices, including to the levels of fitness and personal health, and community relationships. By using what is available, practice becomes more sustainable, and places less strain upon practitioners.

Principle 6. – Produce no waste

By valuing and making use of all the resources that are available to us, nothing goes to waste. (Holmgren 2013a)

In the field of engagement, resources include the means by which you connect with other people, as well as the environment. So ‘producing no waste’ here also points to a degree of care with others, not wasting opportunities to connect, listen, learn or reciprocate when kindness or curiosity is offered. It also serves as a reminder of the importance of efficiency within working practice: to literally not waste material resources and to also stay attuned within an engagement practice in order to avoid and redress undesirable ambiguities. This way, relationships and other organic resources are not left to disintegrate, and engagements started are given appropriate space to find proper resolution.

Principle 7. – From patterns to details

By stepping back, we can observe patterns in nature and society. (Holmgren 2013a)

Pattern recognition establishes the ‘skeleton’ of social design where details come to add flesh, over a longer time. This process draws upon prior and repeated observations, and repeated attempts to synthesise what is observed, with ongoing—and often ‘real time’—feedback. Acceptance is key as bias can easily lead to obscured overall impressions, which can in turn wrongly inform project details. Observation of

social patterns also needs to remain intentionally inclusive, and the active nurturing of ‘patterns’ help to inform the structure of design.

Principle 8. – Integrate rather than segregate

By putting the right things in the right place, relationships develop between them and they support each other. (Holmgren 2013a)

Inclusion is clearly and repeatedly called for in social projects. It is often about adapting a solutions orientation towards enabling a truer diversity of voices to be heard. It is about welcoming people equally from the centre—as well as the edge—and offering forums with the potential to reintegrate, for instance, via acceptance of all modes of honest feedback, and all levels of voluntary engagement. Participation not only needs to be voluntary but to also actively redress coercion. And enacting this principle requires a certain degree of practitioner vulnerability rather than thinking in self-protective terms that may isolate community segments or individuals.

Principle 9. – Use small and slow solutions

Small and slow systems are easier to maintain than big ones: as they make better use of local resources, and produce more sustainable outcomes. (Holmgren 2013a)

Proposing that small steps taken by people are more likely to last, this principle favours small-scale but more deeply integrated forms of progress over rapid change that risks being superficial. The objective is to improve outcomes in justice and local empowerment rather than to seek more rapidly apparent change that has insufficient time to take local root.

Principle 10. – Use and value diversity

Diversity reduces vulnerability to a variety of threats and takes advantage of the unique nature of the environment in which it resides. (Holmgren 2013a)

It is important to be inclusive within a social project by valuing diversity and paying active respect to inherent differences, circumstances and skill levels. The aim of this principle is to also draw upon such differences as a broadening of potential resources.

Principle 11. – Use edges and value the marginal

The interface between things is where the most interesting events take place. These are often the most valuable, diverse and productive elements in the system. (Holmgren 2013a)

In regard to social projects these principles are being applied through valuing and supporting people that are on the edges of society as well as on the edge of wellbeing in their lives because of health, social, economic and educational issues. Through supporting people on the edge we strive to strengthen their self-value and the respect they receive from society/community.

Principle 12. – Creatively use and respond to change

We can have a positive impact on inevitable change by carefully observing, and then intervening at the right time. Allow what is there and what people bring. (Holmgren 2013a)

Being creative in this specific way also involves engagement in the present moment—rather than waiting for or trying to bring about—some future, more ‘perfect moment’. Engaging people in change requires some understanding of their personality, perspectives and interests. And trying to find the ‘common denominator’ between people can require active processes of translation, as well as considerable facilitation skills. Of course, understanding the cause and nature of a change process itself is also key.

SECTION 3 – Pursuing Praxis

People’s first impressions of permaculture as a practice can appear somewhat dichotomous, evoking strong associations with practical skills of self-sufficiency whilst at the same time an idealistically dream-inspired utopianism that might drive people to live radically alternative, and somewhat marginal, lives (Holmgren 2002). And these combined impressions of a ‘practical dreamer’, driven by some kind of vision of a ‘practical utopia’, do—whilst requiring refinement—reflect a reality of pursuing praxis.

The underlying ethos of permaculture could be described as an emphasis upon working with, rather than against, human nature; protracted periods of thoughtful observation rather than protracted and thoughtless labour; and of looking at people and community in all their functions rather than treating any area as a single project system (Mollison 1979). So whilst the ‘project’ as a whole is a type of visionary endeavour, the ‘goal’ is, as with an ecosystem, to cultivate the diversity required for human flourishing. And there are reasons why such flourishing may entail a seeking out of remote cultural and geographical margins. Kropotkin proposes that only the grass roots, local initiatives can give answers for the global crisis, not with the fear of anarchy but with alternative mutual relationships (Kropotkin 1902). The key to happier lives, he suggests, relies on local contexts that are informed by global responsiveness. Settlements that are closer to nature, or somehow operate on the edge of society in regional, rural and outer-urban communities, are hungry for solutions and open to engagement, and I hence see the rural and ‘geographically peripheral’ as both a personal drawcard as well as a practical advantage to my research practice. Distances from both geographic centres and mainstream ideologies provide clearer opportunities to serve the diversity of marginal expression and cultural development. Small communities are often considered too marginal for centralised systems to fully accommodate. So when it comes to deciding upon resource use and allocation, their voice is frequently underrepresented or ignored, and global patterns of social decision-making power tie uniquely localised marginal communities together from across the

world. But when it comes to engagement practice, smaller and marginal communities require custom-made, site-specific approaches, particularly where 'site [as pertaining to all local features of identity] becomes relational' (Irwin & De Cosson 2004, p. 84).

Jones (2010, p. viii) suggests that every project, perspective or propositional change starts with ourselves; so whilst it is important to imagine, strategies and build the global future in theoretical ways, we have to act on local levels. This is consistent with the ethic of 'people care' in which observation also begins with ourselves, and then expands to include our families, neighbours and wider communities. In *Permaculture Pioneers* (Dawborn & Smith 2011), twenty-five permaculture practitioners shared their story about how they came to be interested in permaculture, and how it came to change their lives. What I found notably in common amongst these stories was the all-encompassing impact permaculture had as both a system of understanding, and way of life. Every practitioner clearly did have some background in practical gardening experience. But they also had deep practical questions pertaining to the social and ecological challenges of our times, as well as a yearning to apply what they came to systemically understand as a foundation for a way of life. By engaging perma-culture, they found peers and means to co-create within a global movement.

The problem to define within my practice became about how to mobilise cultural activity as an engagement practice of art. Permaculture as a system, developed by Bill Mollison and David Holmgren (1978), already has a natural form of allegiance with social engagement practice, partly due to the fact that the concept of *permanent culture* is perceived as systemically integral to a truly sustainable system. But whilst authors including Holmgren (2002), Jones (2013), LABOFII (2009), Lebo (2012), Macnamara (2012), and Nagy (2015) have written on the subject of the adaptability of permaculture design to other aspects of life and social interaction there has been very little formal information about how to base an art engagement practice upon the principles of permaculture as an intentional basis of design model.

In seeing myself as a type of provider of a 'cultural service', my practice has much in common with what is normative within the field of permaculture. Driven by a personal desire for engagement that is both locally focused and broadly political, I felt it appropriate to seek out lived engagement within a community space that is rural, remote, seeking self-sufficiency, and that is ideologically open to the engagement with newly tailored forms of cultural (re)invention. Defining the details of such a project could not occur from the outset but rather—as is common to the field of newly resituating engagement practice—required redefining my role as a practitioner, anew. Such perennial reinvention entails revisiting a contingent space in which a prolonged period of uncertainty is part of the observation process and in which making is a form of knowing (Sullivan 2010; Barrett & Bolt 2007; J Gary Knowles 2008). And in order to present findings that might be of appropriately practical use, the problem was about finding a way to transparently share the integration process in which concepts and theory became narratively entwined with both everyday life and experimental research. By reflecting upon key moments that highlighted my personal motivations to practice; by seeking out intentionally holistic research methods and theoretical

positions; and by sharing the examples of other artists that as ‘kindred spirits’ were game changing in my own practice, I hoped to find relevant illustrations, insights and field-led research conclusions that would be useful to future prospective practitioners pursuing a similar mode of praxis.

CONCLUSION of Part One

The central question, ‘how can permaculture ethics and principles (or philosophy and methods), be applied to community engaged art projects?’, came to be defined within, and further guide, practical research into theory-informed frameworks. Each of the theoretical parts which came to frame the central process, helped to build the eventual narrative structure. The inspiration from artists who legitimize personal narrative experience in their work, helped me to define what it was that I hoped to achieve. And defining a workable framework for experiment and narrative in my work, stimulating the to-and-fro shifts required, combined theoretical positioning to start informing praxis.

From the field of practice, the examples of Galeta (Nagy 2015), Jones (2013) and Jaar (2010) provided me with confidence and practical guidance with identifying formal and immaterial processes that can provoke new modes of holistic practice as well as seeing within the world. LABOFIL’s ‘experiments’ came to inform my concept of ‘pilot projects’, in which a series of works driven by the desire for such an open creative process, created the initial momentum and experiences that led to discovering the location and situation that became the ultimate subject of my fieldwork. Schrag’s (2016) diagram further clarified my personal positioning within the theory of community-engaged art definitions. Whilst providing me with usefully relevant project labels, this also opened up discourse regarding the role, place and timing of such definitions: especially in the context of permaculture in which (pre)definition is avoided in order to free up adaptability (as a goal) within the working process. A further benefit of considering the ‘if’ and ‘when’ of practice definition was coming to the concept of antagonistic practice as identified with ‘trickery’. This is not to implicitly connote a negative reading of antagonistic practice, but rather a necessarily personal position on what would best constitute my own maturation as an artist—and hermeneutic role—within my own, still broadly political practice.

After situating a role for the personal (within the project narrative), I needed to explore and refine an intended practical use and theoretical scope of both experimentalism and theoretically informed narrative definitions. To meld in praxis, these theoretical frameworks needed to combine in project-specific ways. One form of solution came from summarizing the ethical and design principles of permaculture multiple times (and revising these from the perspective of practice). In this way, I began to find an emerging and interpretive connection with the systemic principles of permaculture and a more grounded sense of how these might apply in practice. The

process of (pre)definition (and combined observation) in this project involved shifting from theory to practice repeatedly, both conscious and more instinctual ways. And whilst the meanings which came through this practice-led research into potential frameworks were still exploratory, they did provide a much-needed sense of a grounding from which to operate.

In PART ONE I sought to bring the reader through the central features of formative theoretical frameworks; which led into fieldwork praxis now explored in PART TWO.

PART TWO: FIELDWORK

PART TWO is divided into two chapters: each relating to dual aspects of primary fieldwork practice. The first, Chapter 4, begins to look at how theoretical positioning developed into methodologies—including the application of permaculture ethical principles—which evolved out of the framework and into a systemic part of holistic praxis. I also introduce here the phenomenologically inspired role of ‘Hermes’ as the artist. This role plays out in the holistic body of the artwork in Chapter 5, via a series of interrelated engagements—culminating in *MugWall Social Café*—within the regional community of Lorinna, in north central Tasmania. This chapter details the application of permaculture *design* principles within the fieldwork art projects and how these design principles operated as an interpretive instrument for the eventual (and relocated) assessment exhibition.

CHAPTER 4 – The Fieldwork Narratives

Social permaculture, as a necessarily situated construct, has been defined as a form of social engagement within my practice, but in such a way as to reserve the capacity to draw upon other spheres within the broader field. And now, within this chapter, I wish to elaborate upon the framework and methodology of the research that was found to best centre my major fieldwork, in Lorinna. At the beginning of the fieldwork I had to accomplish the university’s Human Research Ethics Committee’s full application. Despite my early antipathy towards an institutionalised ethical process that appeared to be absurd to me, I did come to better define what I understood ethics to mean within my research and beyond, helping to form my framework and methods.

SECTION 1 – Framework

SCENE 2. FOREST/1.

I am standing at the edge of a Tasmanian rain forest. It is dense, with tree-sized ferns and thick undergrowth. There are child-made paths and tunnels in the green, and I can hear children still laughing as they run through a natural maze-land, chasing and hiding. Suddenly I see a smiling face but it disappears and pops up again a few meters away. ‘C’ is walking beside me. C is a resident of Lorinna: a lawyer, with experience in policy writing and ethics, and a mother of two. And I came up to C’s property to consult with her about the ethics application for my research. I was in need of help.

Because my project involves working with children, my supervisors recommended that I apply for a research ethics upgrade with the Social Sciences Human Research Ethical Committee (HREC) to expand the official level of legal coverage of my research. The

Social Sciences HREC ‘reviews all research involving human participation’ in Tasmania, not only within a medical scope, and hence covers a broad range of research areas. HREC covers such disciplinary areas as psychology, business, education and arts—in all areas ‘involving human participation’. But I could find no specific mention of children, or what to do in the case of more organically defined, social engagement research practices.

My first impulse as a practitioner with a specific interest in ethical practice was to embrace the opportunity to address the ethical issues—within the institutional arena—that this application process might raise, as prospective content. Why not? After all, this seemed consistent with the principle of permaculture, which recommends that, with all content, practitioners should ‘observe and interact’. The application process itself, however, was opening a can of worms: requiring categorical answers to difficult problems regarding the boundaries of my research; and my research process, which *ethically* depends upon an inherent flexibility in situ. As confirmed by C, there was no available archive of suitable precedents to study. And furthermore, as an ‘outsider’ to HREC institutions, she was bound not to professionally advise me about how to best handle the matter.

My first ethics upgrade application to HREC was far from perfect and was returned to me with twenty-three comments for my revision. And I exhaled in a rare but colourful string of Hungarian expletives, and visited C again, this time to discuss possibly applicable legal processes of consent. The central topic of our discussion was how to go about obtaining consent and how to identify where such consent is required. According to HREC, participants need to be specified in advance of research activities. But in Lorinna, the questions of how to identify ‘all the members of the Lorinna community’, or who amongst these might conceivably participate in any given project, are far from clear. While C and I spoke, the potential formal requirements appeared to me in an impish and resistant vision of a melodrama. I could see the formation of the official residents of Lorinna in a sombre gathering along the grasslands outside of the community hall—awaiting the description of my artwork:

There is no informal chatter. Perhaps some music plays. But the weight of silence otherwise is almost palpable. People of Lorinna are standing—clustered by family—and delineated by the distance that each stands apart.

The camera reveals the scene in total. Then glides in to the first nuclear or alternate gathering, revealing attentive faces—expectant and immobile.

The camera pans smoothly across to the next family, in like stillness and anticipation... and another family, and other faces, and onwards. And after the last group have been captured in waiting, the camera pans out again to return to the scene in total.

Cut.



Figure 11: Tamas Oszvald, *I am consented*, 2016, digital video still.

The process with HREC revealed to me an odd combination of perceived practical absurdities; legitimate clarity gaps in articulating my practice; and some key differences between the ethical spheres that most pertain to my practice. From a broader perspective, engaging the application process through HREC provided an entry point to more fundamental questions about what it means to be ethical within a community—as an engagement artist.

As a practitioner motivated to serve people adaptably, I believe an artist's role amongst ethical issues is more like a facilitator: where issues might become sensitively revealed, and open up opportunities for collaborative discussions, enabling participants to propose ethical feelings and, incrementally, to embrace greater complexity—with the objectives of inclusivity, growth and learning. Such ethical forums are by nature not predefined from the outset. What appeared absurd to me was that this seemingly highly ethically oriented objective could present systemic problems—even as the most provocative artwork can be deemed ethically acceptable, according to HREC—if the creation process was not participatory, and if the exhibit itself did not constitute part of the research. Likewise, it seemed straightforward to obtain approval for artworks that intrude on privacy, or even generate audience anxiety—so long as the work is not made via processes of human participation.

During the process however, I was obliged to introduce new ways of talking about my research intentions and practice within the community—with a mode of dialogue I normally reserved for the university. And this was helpful to me. I was also obliged to consider boundaries of the artwork in detail, such as when 'the work' can be said to start or finish, or if there are clear distinctions between 'participation' in my research and my participants' everyday lives, and how do I retain the spontaneous engagement process—that is ordinarily so crucial to integrating my practice within a community—to unfold naturally, whilst still meeting the formal demands of the institution?

In permaculture, ethics is defined by situational open responsiveness, and principles of human and earthen care. Within the institution, the role of the ethical application, I concluded, was about systemic risk avoidance, identified via calculable factors that are difficult to reconcile with holistic practices.

Scene ends

As already touched upon, social permaculture within my engagement fieldwork is a multilayered holistic practice. And, as such, the ‘art’ as engagement is the sum total of mindful engagements as opposed to the materialisation of isolable ‘work’, or a specific demarcation in time. The ‘research’ on the other hand, is the invention of an ever-evolving practice: sensitive to the context in which it is situated. Choosing a theoretical position; the parameters necessary to find (and situate within) a suitable community situation; and identifying a meaningful role as an artist to serve that community are not arbitrary choices, but rather a response to a larger social ecology. As such, the chosen parameters of research, whilst not arbitrary, cannot ever be considered fully complete either—if the research is to remain vital. Vitality is also retained by experimentation, and this is where the role of ‘pilot projects’ comes in: where, just like LABOFIL’s ‘experiments’, the language of ‘pilot projects’ is an openly declarative reminder to retain a discipline of interactive observation that is free to change.

And whilst such an experimental forum is necessary, the results of any research project are required to be communicable to future users and, for this purpose, I distinguish the ‘artwork’ as those documentary and other communication processes that select elements of ‘art’ for distillation. The ‘artwork’ also reflects a maturity gained from pilot project experimentation. And, as engagement artwork, the objective is to distil the practice of ‘art’ as a mode of communal change beyond the artist, via the infiltration of a broader community engagement. And both ‘art’ and ‘artwork’ in these senses are the cultural service provided—through social engagement as the *medium*. With this framework in mind, I would like to dedicate the remainder of this chapter to situating the ‘art’ within the context of permaculture as a mindset; the contribution of hermeneutics to the role and ‘character’ of the artist, and to narrative as the chief component of the medium—and the intermediary process in this particular practice-led research that operates in multiple languages.

SECTION 2 – Methodology

SOCIAL PERMACULTURE: AS A LIVING MINDSET

In art, as in life, it is useful to seek a balance between structure *and* freedom. To this end, I find permaculture a useful tool, both in enabling ‘art’ concepts to develop and in

terms of community-engaged art, enabling the terms of community facilitation to occur. The shared structure provides an entry-point that is communicable. And the uniqueness and personal background of participants make each instance of practice unique. Communication is, as Peck (1987) suggests, one basis of defining—and I would suggest engaging—‘real’ community, where structure comes from engagement and can also be arbitrary. But I have found the concepts of permaculture to be, as Holmgren suggests (2002), suitably socially oriented and positive for communal practice.

Permaculture methods clearly appeared to me as a new and useful discipline in social (art) practice but the dynamics of application did not occur as was expected. I found that permaculture can be used as a very loose, versatile form of community tool. It is embedded within the meaning of permaculture that its application depends upon flexible circumstances. It is like ‘community’ in that the context in which the word ‘community’ is used partially defines the word. Likewise with ‘social permaculture’.

My original intention was to apply permaculture principles to pre-establish a design for projects worked upon, using the experimental methods and ideas of social permaculture to help structurally ‘sculpt’ ideas of—and within—the community, and where ‘design’ would take into consideration such factors as available time, participant motivations, and pre-established purpose. But my use of permaculture principles since the project began has slowly shifted. From taking the whole of the system as a ‘tool to hand’, the methods of permaculture developed into something more conceptual—‘a mindset’—within my practice. The principles morphed into an ever more holistic approach: embracing feeling and all modes of engagement, and narrowing the distinction between my ‘role as an artist’, and my ‘role as a living being’—and where, both as an artist and person, I am striving to always *be* a conscious self.

The shift towards this conception of a mindset, and as a dialogue opening structure, I attribute to the influence of experiential forms of hermeneutics. The permaculture principles, however, are still essentially formative, and essential for the ongoing observational maintenance of the conceptual idea, and the means to engage this. Both in theory and practice, I return to these often—as such recurrent visitation is required to bring the principles from an abstract construct and into a way of life. And to achieve a way of life as a practice of *research* requires a theoretical established method upon which to situate findings communicably. For this I find it useful to turn to hermeneutics.

PHENOMENOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS: DEFINING PARTICIPANT-OBSERVATION

Phenomenological hermeneutics is both an area of philosophy and a research tool (Turay 1984). The hermeneutic traditions of interpreting text were born of theological studies: where those with a hermeneutic role were held to have a certain power and responsibility for interpreting ancient ideas, and then revitalising those ideas for use in contemporary contexts. The role of philosophers and theologians became apparent via

processes of debate, clarification and analysis, translating meanings and messages for life, as perceived from 'the God/s'.

Through the collective works of philosophers including Friedrich Schleiermacher, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur and others, hermeneutics was argued for as a tool within various disciplines of human study for undertaking research. As a tool, it is used for interpreting experience, where the objective is to bring the essence of a lived experience into an interpretive and descriptive textual realm, which continues to acknowledge the complexity of that experience (Van Manen 1997).

Another key methodological objective is to not take anything for granted but rather to embrace the idea that by taking a phenomenological approach we might be '...able to investigate and discover what is invariable in all the variations of the phenomenon, i.e. its essential meaning, its "essence"' (Kafle 2013, p. 189).

Phenomenology, as defined above, also draws a distinction between the objective outer world, and the 'life world' of our intentional conscious existence—and is seen in this way to be a potential means to enable us access to the 'essential meaning' of the world. This 'essential meaning' is described as:

... something with which humans are familiar in the practices of life, and this familiarity has to be expressed through the way of living, through actions, through narratives and through reflection. (Lindseth & Norberg 2004, p. 147)

The hermeneutic nature of cognition suggests that we not only discover phenomena but, by starting from the data of multisensory experience, also interpretively explain the data. Every interpretive experience could therefore be said to occur within some form of a hermeneutic circle. And every partial experience only makes sense as knowledge in the context of the whole. Our preliminary experiences of truth are clearly influenced by the likes of upbringing, ideology and traditions, which serve to frame and influence our partial knowledge experiences. And in turn, every partial knowledge experience serves to enrich and expand preliminary perceptions of the whole (Turay 1984). Our preliminary—and interdependently expanded—sources of knowledge, then, require that we are as perceptively open as possible: to offer a valid authentically expansive process, albeit one that cannot be 'complete'.

HERMES: AS THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST

Ralph C Bodor proposes that hermeneutics can be approached in two quite different ways (Bodor 2006). The first is by engaging with hermeneutic philosophy and the second way is as a tool—via a type of metaphoric engagement with the qualities and capabilities of the Greek god, Hermes. The latter path is the one, which most clearly resonates with me. Hermes's role in theatrical mythology is as a messenger who translates between the gods, mortals and the underworld, and between their multiple languages. The character of Hermes is hence of one who travels between and

interpretively connects things, but who also personally and interpretively meditates. Jaireth describes this role as a narrator, the purpose of whose presence is to narrate ‘about the nature of his or her meditation’ (Jaireth 1996, p. 73). And, as Jaireth points out, Hermes offers an interpretation that is never neutral because as a narrator he ‘operates like a focusing device by drawing [selective] attention to particular aspects of the play’ (Jaireth 1996, p. 73).

My own personal roles in Lorinna also include transitional roles: as a husband, father and a friend; a community member and a student, researcher and teacher; as a migrant (in a liminal, transitory state); and an artist—craftsperson, performer, storyteller and social practitioner. These roles each overlap and each role—from husband through to artist—are constantly and inseparably present within one another. My role as an artist-participant within the community is to mediate between subjective spaces that contain smaller, internal differences, even within each single project. Consistency is something allowed to develop over time. What is more important is attuning to multiple voices, and reflecting on the nuances of idiosyncratic meanings in context. And then to consider how these meanings can be a resource for cultivating change and broader modes of engagement.

In her book *One place after another*, Miwon Kwon (2002) dedicates a chapter to the comparatively recent reconfiguration of the role of the artist, who she sees now as a type of ‘cultural-artistic service provider rather than a producer of aesthetic objects’. It is a definition I agree with: even whilst I feel conflicted to be in a world where the production of aesthetic objects could be treated with redundancy, and where the provision of ‘cultural services’ has become such a complex role to forge, to attain legitimacy. Helguera (2011) questions whether it matters if the activity of social practice remains bound to the field of art at all, pointing out that:

[art students]... often find themselves wondering whether it would be more useful to abandon art altogether and instead become professional community organizers, activists, politicians, ethnographers, or sociologists. (Helguera 2011, p. 4).

I would suggest that the role of the artist is not a clear one for most people. And in a community-engaged project, it is the artists’ responsibility to continually revisit and revise this role—communicating and renegotiating in situ—as an integral part of practice. The Cuban artist Tania Bruguera puts it this way: that we have to create entry points for the non-informed audience to get around the barriers which exist between works of art, and the audience for which such artworks may not be accessible (Bruguera 2013). And this process inevitably leads to engagement with both concepts of community itself as well as the subsequent political dimensions, whereas Kwon (2002, p. 7) puts it, ‘... the identity or definition of a community remains open, like the site, as a scene of political struggle’.

NARRATIVE: AS INTERMEDIA

Narrative, as an inventive medium, can provide situated entry points to community engagement practice. 'Using' narrative is not an option within a community engagement process, but rather an inevitable element, which serves a key function between artists, participants and institutions, and makes connections possible. Very often, the fabric of a community is revealed via archetypes held within stories. And sometimes stories take the simple form of revealing how to get things done.

It [the storytelling]... contains, openly or covertly, something useful. The usefulness may, in one case, consist in a moral; in another, in some practical advice; in a third, a proverb or maxim. (Benjamin 2006, p. 364)

Stories speak of directions, and transformation, as well as how to handle these elements of change. And everyday actions, social patterns and roles—all inadvertently carry such stories with them. Permaculture does this too: in stories of multilayered practicality.

In the small and remote valley of Lorinna, the story of getting here, and getting to know this hidden place brings with it the stories of how the community started itself. The function of such stories is not merely to satisfy socio-historical curiosities, but rather how community is generated through such tellings. The 'fact' of whether or not such stories are 'true' is not so important. Stories do not simply reflect community experiences, but also impact upon them. Narratives can repeat patterns that reinforce the social functions they set out to describe. Stories are relational structures and, through them, communities form relationships with who they are, how things are, and in which direction a community is headed.

Within Australian Aboriginal culture, stories actively transmit such relational functions, whilst in much of Europe and in many western cultures the multilayered stories of old no longer hold such a deep connection between people and place. And the epic legends and folk tales are predominantly told now within entertainment professions.

Walter Benjamin, in his essay 'The Storyteller', bemoans this loss, and how he subsequently also sees how '... the gift for listening is lost and the community of listeners disappears' (Benjamin 2006, p. 367). He expressed his fear that 'the art of storytelling is coming to an end' (Benjamin 2006, p. 362) and 'it is as if something that seemed inalienable to us, the securest among our possessions, were taken from us: the ability to exchange experiences' (Benjamin 2006, p. 362). Although Benjamin's 'The Storyteller' was published in 1936 at the same time when 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' was first printed, they are both still relevant and continue 'to inspire significant scholarly attention as a major work[s] in the history of modern aesthetic and political criticism' (Larsen 2010). They represent Benjamin's cultural criticism in effort to produce a theory of art that is 'useful for the formulation of revolutionary demands in the politics of art' (Benjamin 1936).

Stories though can continue to be celebratory as well as embedded within the ordinary. As a functional storyteller in Lorinna, I experienced both. I told stories in moments of celebration. But in the *MugWall Social Café*, a space evolved for stories within the 'ordinary' of multiply repeated Sundays.

Benjamin observed that 'more and more often there is embarrassment all around when the wish to hear a story is expressed' (Benjamin 2006, p. 362). And importantly, I think, the café was a 'safe' situation, with very little disturbance from the company of strangers. The permaculture 'fair share' ethic became interpreted as a form of right to exchange. The role of the historic storyteller unveils two archaic forms. One is embedded in the resident tiller of the soil who, with his hand in the earth, knows all the local tales and traditions. The other is the trading seaman who brings tales from afar.

Benjamin proposes that '[storytelling] does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again' (Benjamin 2006, p. 362). It reveals the changing nature of research, facts and how legitimate essence seeking is understood. And I would argue that the hermeneutic approach towards researching the essence does not marry with a report method either. It does seek to reach the essence though: via storytelling.

CHAPTER 5 – The Artwork: Narrative Social Permaculture as Community Engagement Practice

This chapter is divided into two related sections. The first situates narrative as defined by ritual, storytelling and performance within Lorinna, and describes the development of introducing experimentally based oral traditions as central projects within the social permaculture artwork. Further projects within this broader artwork illustrate the application of permaculture design principles directly, and in SECTION 2 I elucidate how a holistic application of such principles offers a more vitally engaged mode of practice than does drawing upon principles in either step-wise or pre-decided ways.

SECTION 1 – Narratives Aloud

There have been great societies that did not use the wheel, but there have been no societies that did not tell stories. (Le Guin & Wood 1992, p. 31)

STORYTELLING AND LOCAL RITUAL

It is difficult to identify the moment (if indeed there is such a thing) that my role as a social practitioner evolved from my involvements as a performer, craftsperson and community member. Initially my more traditional creative skills, such as storytelling, stilt-walking, woodcarving and photography helped identify me as an artist within the community. Then my main creative entry point to the Lorinna community came to me through performance in the form of classical storytelling, and the organisation of celebratory rituals such as for each equinox and solstice.

I combine both storytelling and ritual in this section deliberately, as rituals within Lorinna are always underpinned by narrative structure. The rituals inherently involve some form of transformation, and narrative suggestions about the capacity and nature of change. Tribal communities were often steeped in religious and ritual practices where religion unified people as a community of common purpose, identity and codes of conduct (Csányi 1989). And rituals helped establish boundaries—defining who is, or is not, a member—and what the roles and functions were, entailed by membership. They offer the opportunity to conjure the likes of our shared gratitude or fears in a schema of fortune, or to revisit selective elements of our lives under the guise of an imaginative practice that helps us yield collaborative ‘results’ that are meaningful. Such celebratory rituals are important as they establish community events where everyone can participate, connect interpersonally, and connect to a broader world by offering the invention of new roles in which participants can each engage personally.

The Lorinna community did not wish to identify with pre-existing religions, even though the solstice and equinox practices did draw upon the archaic. For some

participants, community was seen to be grounded by the larger forms of unity found in concepts of divine power or nature but, for the people of Lorinna, a basis upon the secular was seen as preferable. In general, the result of these differences I would say is still consistent with an interpretation of the community as living in their post-religious moment. And this balance between the post-religious, folk traditions and the secular was the basis of ritualised narrative explored within Lorinna. But what was to be involved in drawing narrative out of such diverse cultural and historic contexts? And in what sense are they relevant within the new and evolving context within Lorinna?

Storytelling was not a visible part of life in the valley before our family arrived. And whilst I have always believed in the power of stories, I had still seen myself more as a performer than a storyteller. I had seen glimmers of the power of storytelling amongst the local harvest market before leaving Hungary and was also aware of the extended use of stories in areas of therapy and recreation. But in Hungary the community was an amorphous one, and less isolated. My own intentions for extended narrative use was somewhat beyond the scope of my confidence when commencing this fieldwork as I felt drawn to stories as Iris Curteis describes them, where:

The act of telling and listening to a story fulfils an intrinsic human need in increasingly complex and mediated societies. Storytelling allows creative interaction in a time-space continuum, and, by doing so, forms community without establishing proscriptive structures. (Curteis 2011, p. 192)

My objective thus shifted to how I understand the role of storytelling in the vitalisation of local cultural life. Could the community use a storyteller? And can I fulfil the commitment entailed in becoming a storytelling social practitioner, whose objectives are to cultivate local community practices and opportunities for the growth of social connectedness—and connectedness with place?

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE EVENTS

Both private and public events provided welcome reasons for storytelling. Private events were organised by families and individual members of the Lorinna community and hence were not advertised via circulated public invitations to the whole of the valley, but were nonetheless open to most members. Sometimes there were private functions held in the community hall. But most often, private events happened upon private properties. Public events on the other hand were generally organised by groups of people and were open to attendance from anyone in the valley including friends, extended family, and even public visitors from outside the valley.

There is only one formally organised event with an open attendance annually in Lorinna, and this is the autumn Harvest Feast. This is also the largest and most widely attended celebration, connecting nearly everyone in Lorinna, and earmarked upon all calendars as THE ‘must-be-there’ occasion. The Harvest Feast involves up to three days of anticipated ritualistic happenings. And participation really defines who is, or is not, a member of the community. This harvest ritual keeps connections vital between

participants who might not otherwise have had the chance to meet at other times of year, even if this does not always afford participants much time for talk. The event is a sensorially occupied time, filled with activity and sights to see, local foods and music with dance. And it always culminates in a combined communal dinner and fund-raising auction where local residents sell their donated goods as a contribution to feast day expenses.

I performed at two Harvest Feast occasions before either moving to Lorinna, or knowing what significance the place would hold for my life, my family or my research. I shall return to these performances shortly.

STORYTELLING AS PERFORMANCE

I see clear distinctions between storytelling and performance within my practice. Performance I see as a one-person 'show', which highlights the colourful mode of entertainment within the act. The audience becomes involved as actors, featured within the story. Small, symbolic props serve as costuming and story elements, be that a sword, a hat, or a stick-on-moustache. The plot is filled with action, music and dramatic sounds, technically operating via techniques intended for larger audiences and public space such as utilising elements of physical theatre, or involving bodily engagements to create comical situations and interactions. These techniques are characteristic of Hungarian street performing, which is the context in which I learned them. More traditionally, such street performance would involve placing a performer into an unknown audience and situation in which to perform.

My first Harvest Feast performance was an adaptation of the Hungarian folk story of the Golden Fur Sheep, which tells the tale of a poor young boy who, in seeking out his fate and fortune, and overcoming a series of adventurous challenges, comes to own the Golden Fur Sheep and thus win the hand of a beautiful young princess. I selected one of the boys to become the prince, and enlisted numerous members of the audience to play supporting roles until, at the end, one of the girls was chosen as the princess who, in then being married to the poor boy, made the chosen princess and boy become the official 'Queen and King of Lorinnia'. I hadn't realised the impact of the performance until the following year when, just prior to another performance, children gathered to ask me if I was going to choose a new queen and king for the following year.

These requests reminded me of the Hungarian tradition Pünkösdi Királtság, which tells of the Kingdom of Pentecost where, through a series of ability games, young men and women would vie for the honourable titles of Pentecost King and Queen, which would then be held for a year. The title was not only symbolic, but conferred real privileges in the pub, weddings and other celebrations, and in many parts of Hungary this tradition is an embedded component of a rites of passage ritual.

When I taught one of the boys how to carve a wooden spoon, he put a crown on the handle as decoration in acknowledgement of having been selected King of Lorinnia that year. When telling the tale of the Golden Fur Sheep in the valley, the symbolic

impact of being the King and Queen of Lorinnndia hadn't occurred to me. But in a small and remote valley, performative roles have a stronger influence than is likely in more commercially available circumstances. As this act was not part of existing local ritual heritage, I had to think carefully as the impact of the annual royal selection could also be greater than I had imagined.

TRADITIONAL STORYTELLING

Traditional storytelling does not involve the melodramatic employment of theatrical gestures and does not require a stage, however makeshift or temporary this may be. Rather, the stage is set within the mind and imagination of the audience. The elements are evocative, psychological and intimate, and likewise occur within closely proximate, intimate spaces. The atmosphere is free of drums and other form of bombastic sound-making. Instead, I use a single pipe called a 'tilinko' to mark the moment when a collective storytelling begins. This mark, as Curteis (2011, p. 198) suggests, represents 'a collective consciousness... [that]... the storytelling has begun' and, he adds, to mark 'the shift into the liminal story space'. This tilinko, as a symbolic instrument of storytelling, has no predrilled tone holes. Rather—in order to play a melody—I open and close the mouthpiece, varying the amount and pressure of the air blown as I do so. Starting the storytelling with the flute has become my own ritual that Curteis describes as 'a degree of formality or ritual, such as call-and-response openings, which signal communal readiness,' (Curteis 2011, p. 198). After a brief trill upon the flute, I tell my audience that storytelling is just like this wooden pipe. Stories are dead or deep-sleeping materials that need breathing into to come alive. And they are never exactly the same story twice, just as it is not possible to repeat the intensity or volume of air that once blew through a flute.

When I first arrived in Tasmania, I was an experimental performer, but not a storyteller. So when faced with my first storytelling experiences within Lorinna, I felt naked without the dramatic events, or props to reach for, that were available to me during performance. The loud and uproarious art forms are energy intensive, and do present challenges, but they are quite different in nature to those required by the facilitation of stillness and internal imaginings. So the step into the more intimate modes of storytelling was a step out of my comfort zone.

Not only was the intimacy of storytelling new to me, but there are also differences between telling stories in Lorinna and the practice of storytelling in more common ways. C. storytelling has become more like performance in character. Stories have become a form of entertainment where often a professional storyteller will attend a once-only planned public engagement, such as a school, library or festival. Neither the storyteller, nor members of the audience, know each other, or are likely to meet again. The relationships are not likely to be personal, and the opportunity to discuss such stories is rare. The message of such a story then is unidirectional: devoid of the interpersonal experience of the culture, pedagogy, social or spiritual background of the audience. Such stories, by not being repeated, are not cumulative, intimately personalised, or sub-culturally formative in any specifically intentional kind of way.

According to Curteis (2011), the traditional ‘oral storytelling, via the power of personal detail, overcomes disabling distance and engages us individually and collectively to effect positive social change’. And in this way, my storytelling in Lorinna came to greater resemble traditional storytelling than it did contemporary practice. My long-term residence in Lorinna allowed me to explore the potentials of storytelling, based upon observation and experience and, within the stable and isolated community, develop a space where repeated storytelling actions could play an important role. It turned out that the greatest contribution I make towards both private and public events is storytelling. It became a normal ritual: that we all sit down in a circle and, after the flute song, a story will begin.

Walter Benjamin proposed two storytelling archetypes—one of the local toil tiller, and the other, the travelling sailor. And to these main types, he adds a third:

The resident master craftsman and the traveling journeymen worked together in the same rooms; and every master had been a traveling journeyman before he settled down in his hometown or somewhere else. If peasants and seamen were past masters of storytelling, the artisan class was its university. In it was combined the lore of faraway places, such as a much-travelled man brings home, with the lore of the past, as it best reveals itself to natives of a place. (Benjamin 2006, p. 363)

And this describes my position as a resident storyteller within the community. My role remained interchangeable between being an internal observer-participant—who both shared and helped to create local narratives—and an external observer who brought tales from faraway.

MY FIRST STORYTELLING

My first storytelling was prepared for a children’s birthday party that I was invited to attend. Birthday parties in the valley are important social occasions. There were no planned activities other than a game of ‘pass the parcel’, and the children were happy to play amongst each other as they normally did. The environment felt safe, familiar, and suitable for adventuring.

The birthday girl’s family had moved to the valley only a few years earlier, and the construction of their home had just recently began. So in the interim, they lived in a caravan, and under the adjoining shelter between the caravan and a shipping container. The birthday was the first occasion in which they could officially invite people from the valley over to share a meal, and there were tables, chairs and food set up beneath the skeletal wooden frames of their future house. Many present were already familiar with the development because, as is usual practice in Lorinna, the construction was built partially by reciprocal labour agreements and modes of exchange including, for instance, firewood. Even several early adolescent boys had pitched in with the build for pocket money or exchange.

As people are concerned about the unnecessary usage of cars inside the valley, walking tracks were opening up between the properties. The tracks to this particular property reduced the physical distance to 2 km from our house, as compared to more than 6 km by road. Thanks to new tracks, several guests arrived on foot through the forest, as I did.

I chose what I felt was a fitting story to tell that was based on friendship and mutual aid. The tale had a clear moral message but was devoid of difficult symbolism. It was an Indian fable from the Panchatantra collection, written by Vishnu Sharma, an Indian scholar who wrote to impart values of wisdom for King Sudarshan's three sons entering princehood. Panchatantra tales typically anthropomorphise animal characters whose emotive journeys are drawn to instruct via the personification of empathy. In the story, four good friends lived in the forest: the Mouse, the Crow, the Turtle and the Deer. They met every day to talk and to share stories. One day the Deer did not come as he got caught in a hunter's trap. The friends were all different with their own special skills and strengths so together they managed to free the deer and shoo away the hunter forever (see Appendix 3).



Figure 12: Tamas Oszvald, *The Mouse, the Crow, the Turtle and the Deer*, storytelling, 2015, digital image. Photograph by Tamas Oszvald.

My intention was to be transparent in the telling of an easily relatable story, one in which the gathered audience could clearly situate themselves. There were children of different ages present so the tale could not be too difficult or frightening for those really young, yet not seem foolish to older children either. Yet the group dynamic here felt free of mainstream pressures to disparage. And there was a comfortable empathy for the storytelling to a multi-aged audience.

In telling Hungarian and Indian stories, it was my hope to bring about a situation in which ‘folktales ... globalise our feelings for the duration of their telling’ and where ‘the comprehensive effect... can reach far beyond it’ (Curteis 2011, p. 195). In our globalised world, having access to online and printed materials of different cultures’ stories enables their reuse within different contexts. The cross-cultural use of stories and any cultural text ‘needs to be conducted in the most respectful and sensitive manner’ (Curteis 2011, p. 196) rather than avoided. It is the storyteller’s responsibility to put her/his audience in context, invite the listener into another (cultural) world and not view it from the outside. There is no single formula for avoiding appropriation or misrepresentation: instead, the ethical awareness and judgement of the storyteller informs a respectful retelling.

My objectives in both performance and storytelling spaces were to start engagement with situation appropriate tales that offer a clear relatable message, suitable for multi-aged audiences, and offer a means to connect with a broader, multicultural world. And in drawing upon my Hungarian folk heritage connections, I found a way to personify a hermeneutic connection with the Lorinna community that became so significant to my family and practice.

Both performative and storytelling traditions emerged as a form of service that I could offer the Lorinna community. And spoken words were what shaped this project: providing the entry point into Lorinna as a researcher, family resident and cultural practitioner of the community, as well as an evolving tool of social permaculture engagement practice and design.

SECTION 2 – Narratives of Social Permaculture Design

Early in my research, I proposed that it is possible to consider a community of people the material of an art project and to draw from permaculture to form an approach to working with people, where human relationships are treated metaphorically as a garden, and where the artist becomes a kind of gardener—as a perma(nent) cultural facilitator.

In this section I describe two key projects that, being based upon my central work as it progressed within Lorinna, provide developed examples of how such facilitation might work. The first is the *Vision Statement* project, which represents my first and more literal foray into directly situated social permaculture practice. And the second is the

MugWall Social Café, which became a core and ongoing, socially responsive work that tied all other Lorinna-based projects together, and helped to define both my practice and theoretical position.

VISION STATEMENT

In the permaculture design process, a ‘vision statement’ is a short written summary that describes a landowner’s vision of how a permaculture design would apply to their property, as imagined fully established in several years’ time. It is written before the designer begins to serve as a practical and symbolic guide.



Figure 13: Tamas Oszvald, *Vision Statement*, installation, 2016, digital image. Photograph by Tamas Oszvald.

The *Vision Statement*, as an artwork, metaphorically followed these practical and symbolic intentions. I invited participation through a combination of personal interaction, well-utilized Lorinna community forums (mailing lists, Facebook, and a local quarterly newsletter) and via a simple poster for the community hall. I asked participants to imagine their community in five years’ time, and in a few basic sentences, to describe what it looks and feels like to them, and how they would describe it to a person who has never been to Lorinna. Before they began, I also asked them for permission to install segments of written statements—anonously—on boards throughout the valley.

The Lorinna community comprises a diverse combination of long-term inhabitants and more recent arrivals, from multiple ethnic and other cultural backgrounds. As such, there is no singular ‘vision’ of community so much as multiple alter-narratives about what the future in Lorinna might ideally look like. As there had been no prior direct vehicle for comparing social value diversity prior to this project, the narrative in this piece was to be driven by the unveiling of alter-narratives already existing within the community. By displaying anonymous statements, I hoped to generate open

discussion not for the purposes of finding a dominant narrative but, rather, to allow multiple alter-narratives to appear and to influence one another.

So whilst the Vision Statement was a symbolic act, the hope was to enable more intentional discussions to occur. Thinking about the future in this way was not intended to provide a stepwise recipe for design but rather provide an avenue to explore the hopes and dreams of participants; material to contemplate change potentials, and a way to better understand and interact with the participants themselves.

The call for the project was inclusive of all households. But as expected, participation only came from participants already active within community life and exclusively from amongst the 'Lorindians'. I did not interpret non-participation as rejection, as I was privileged to have become on familiar and communicative terms with everyone who permanently lived in the valley. Conversations enabled by my familiarity with all the people who lived permanently in the valley revealed that those electing not to participate were mostly simply shy, preferred a reclusive way of living, or were busy. A minority did not see a point to the work, and warned me about the potential to create a conflict situation. But no one was decidedly against the project, or wished to prevent the project. Instead there was curiosity.

Initially, I received a total of seven statements, representative of around one third of residential households. The future imagined by these statements prioritised values of practical independence and self-governance: where the development of alternative energy infrastructure, cooperative building resources, and the capacity to locally maintain roads were high priorities, alongside the capacity to grow a healthy and organic, self-sustaining food supply.

Enhanced modes of communication, and the development of interpersonal relationships were also a high priority, with more mention of these topics that either encompassed broader politico-economic concerns, or personal concerns about health, food or parenting. As a vision of the future, I interpreted these findings to come from a focus upon what could be qualitatively enhanced in Lorinna, rather than what at present is clearly prioritised by the dedication of time. Whilst residents in conversation are frequently engaged on topics pertaining to sustainability and broad global issues, the focus in statements was firmly centred on local action. A 'strong alternative local currency to trade goods and services' was suggested for instance, as required for the development of a viable local market—alongside several mentions of locally grown organic food. Overall, people identified the community as being an engaged, vibrant, progressive place, where people actively seek out personal and social betterment.

Out of the seven statements, nine hand-painted boards were made from locally available and reused material. Each board displayed only one sentence, enhanced from the longer texts. I informed again the Lorinna community through all the previously

used forums that the boards would be temporarily installed around the local food co-op shed while the community members can reflect, comment and discuss them or raise any concern. Having no negative feedback, the boards were installed within two days all around the valley of Lorinna. Locations of the boards were carefully planned, deliberately chosen and permitted by the landowners, with the boards affixed on the border of the private and public land.

On the first day, one of the boards was vandalised. The following day, another disappeared, which led to my removing all boards only three days after the installation. I didn't experience the unexpected vandalism as a failure, but rather as an opportunity to practise the permaculture principle of self-regulation while accepting feedback. I informed the community about my decision to relocate the remaining seven boards to the garden of the *MugWall Social Café*. As the café at least weekly offered a public engagement with its location, the boards were still accessible to the wider community. Referring to the unplanned relocation in an email, one of the community members (who did not send me a vision statement) asked: 'Where else but Lorinna could you do this?' (ie. installing these kind of statements). I already knew that Lorinna was not a singly unified community, but I would never have expected such vandalism—and within such a short timeframe. I was quite sure the boards would generate discussion—as they were already generating interest before installation. But, as part of my intention within this study was to step away from antagonistic approaches, the level of confrontation did see me change my original plan. By relocating the boards I wanted to demonstrate respect and fairness toward dissent. And also because the preparation of the final Assessment Exhibition temporarily I moved out of the valley for a four week period; and was therefore unable to fulfil any personal requests for immediate follow-up discussion.

There is no way to please everyone in a community engaged art project. A project can prepare a community to commence a project, (in this case, with a period in which people had to opportunity to respond or send me their visions), but the scope of a projects' reach includes everyone—including those who may well elect not to participate who encounter it. Residents within the valley felt fairly sure they knew who had intervened; but surprisingly the act (of vandalism) itself did not discourage willing participants' perception of it, and rather actually sowed seeds of participant directed action. I offered the community the option to decide for themselves about whether or not to reinstall the boards, or at what location. After five months, they eventually responded:

I'd like to talk to you sometime about reinstalling your message boards. I think if we could do it with explanations of what they attached (visions) they could be very healing for us all while we are in the process of valley wide talking. I think despite all your efforts to notify people about the purpose of the boards while you were here, some people just didn't absorb it. But if '5 year vision' is written on them or by them it is so in everybody's face that misinterpretation is

impossible. They are after all outreach for healing. Let's make them do what they are suppose to... (Rahmah 2017)

The challenges of the public installation might be explained by an insufficiency of information—or by some form of fear centred around the idea of having 'a vision' relating to the community. Some residents suggested a 'dream' for Lorinna would be a preferable term to 'vision'. One person explicitly told me:

I'm better with having a 'dream' for Lorinna rather than a vision. [...] Dreams seem free and safe and possible – whereas vision statements (in my experience) are often squeezed by pragmatism into something quite different from what you started with. (Wills 2016)

In order to cultivate a more in-depth and longer-term dialogue on the subject, I was open to the project running over a longer term, and to make amends to it as necessary. In the end, the ethos of the *MugWall Social Café* project was what provided the required platform for informal conversations, which enabled this project to more fully develop, and evolve.

(For the Vision Statements see Appendix 1 and 2)

MUGWALL SOCIAL CAFÉ

The most I can say is that my project attempts to celebrate the dinner table as the most important performance venue we have as a culture, particularly as a source for storytelling. The other political / social / community / educational / participatory aspects are just gravy. (Schrag 2013)

The *MugWall Social Café* was an informal meeting space, held in the small and temporary home where my family and I lived in Lorinna, and that offered a limited range of organic homemade produce to share with all who attended. Alongside the café, my studio served as an adjoining gallery space for the rotating exhibition of local people's work.



And both café and gallery became an every-Friday and soon after opening, a long-term every-Sunday event. We were always open the same hours, within the same location, and always offering a rotating range of organic coffees, spiced teas and sweets but the visiting patterns were open, and encouraged a degree of randomness. And local residents were aware that what they were participating in was an artwork.

Setting up the café's operational structure physically was a simple matter. I installed an extra counter to separate the kitchen from the living room; made and installed a shelf upon which to host guest mugs; and painted signs for the driveway and gallery entrances with my family. Each café day, we arranged furniture to create an ambient café setting. We drew up a menu and pricelist, and created interior signs to direct our patrons towards the gallery as well as ordering and pay stations. The name of the café came from a solution to not having enough mugs to run a café. I recalled my grandfather occasionally taking me along to his favourite pub when I was a boy, where regular patrons had their own glass brought to them from a shelf when they entered. So, we asked people to bring along a mug to leave. And a host wall of mugs seemed like a quaint mode of engagement.

The *MugWall Social Café* opened on the first day of 2016 after sending the following by email to the community on 30 December 2015.

We thought that a weekly cafe day at our tiny place (12 Ladybird Lane) would be great. Not just because we love to meet you, but it would serve the community, offering a place to meet without the pressure to do or participate in anything. And as you might all know Tamas' PhD research about community art requires field studies and this project will be one of them.

How will it work and operate?

- It is a non-commercial, non-business, not for profit initiative. You can donate money, coffee, tea, tea-herbs, honey, gluten free flour, coconut milk, eggs, a smile, conversation, jokes, skills, or your time.*
- We will be open between 10am-6pm on every Friday till Harvest Feast...*
- First time you visit us, please BRING YOUR OWN MUG, and leave it with us. They already have a dedicated place, a wall for mugs, here comes the name: Mug Wall Social Cafe...*
- We will always have coffee, hot chocolate, ginger tea, black tea, green tea, hopefully herbs too. Also some biscuits, cookies, cake, ice cream, all homemade, mostly gluten free. If you come late afternoon, we might run out of the sweeties...*
- BYO, if you want, you can have your own food or drink.*
- We plan to have art exhibitions, with a two-three weeks change over. If you have something to show, talk to us!*

– *If you or your kids want to do a shift (full day, half day, few hours), you are all welcome!*

So, that's it in a nutshell.

Grand Opening 10am Friday, 1 January 2016.

It would sound theoretically appropriate to suggest that the café was the careful result of many hours' brainstorming based upon well-documented observations, in order to form a project plan. But this is not how it happened. The café felt more like an unplanned lovechild of the marriage between our family and the broader community. The *MugWall Social Café* was intended as an inclusive initiative for the whole community, with an open invitation to people living throughout the valley. By virtue of a social history that predated our arrival, the visitation of some participants did preclude the visitation of others, especially to begin with, and this took time to overcome.

But this could only have come about through the processes of immersion in the ethical and systemic principles of permaculture. The principles of permaculture, rather than becoming a stepwise tool, had become a way of life in both my practice and within my family. And whilst the café felt born out of our embeddedness in the community, it also stemmed from some underlying socially pragmatic urge to create what permaculture calls 'the threshold' situation in which, through the creation of a 'liminal space', we could meet the community in a freely informal setting, and find the fluid means to cultivate a broader engagement with communal change.

Whilst the principles of permaculture design were not drawn upon like one might use a checklist, the frequency with which they were revisited and reflected upon infiltrated all aspects of my practice as an artist, and artist as family, until we drew no distinctions between the production of artwork and the ethical engagement of life.



Figure 15: Tamas Oszvald, *MugWall Social Café*, interior, 2016, digital image. Photograph by Tamas Oszvald.

The application of principles then is not an ad hoc or random reflection, but rather an illustration of how experiential embodiment of the principles can play out in practice. The first permaculture principle, *observe through interaction* was key to the development of *MugWall Social Café*: as observation of the community, myself and my family all led to (and were led by) the ongoing interaction between these socially component 'parts' of the organic communal 'system'. And the biofeedback within this system was also key to the ongoing recreation of MugWall as a vital space. The element of self-consciousness could be considered partially performative, but as our real home and real family opened up private doors, the act was also a genuinely lived and natural one.

There are multiple forms of *caught and stored energy* within the café, starting with the mugs themselves, which return people to a situated site in which the mug evokes both recurring memory and the symbolic means to engage an emergent ritual. Several external visitors who visited the site also proposed replicating the idea in the form of their own cafés and, in this sense, visitors were able to 'catch and store' what is involved in running the experience and, in the MugWall example, as a hospitable model of artwork. The gallery also put on display the energies of local participants, revealing new information about people as work to share. Recipes are also forms of stored energetic knowledge, passed down in some cases over generations, and are socially transferable to others in new, revitalising contexts. Recipe ingredients can be seen similarly as stored energy. And at the café, we preserved local organic crops into tasty caloric jams, and dried garden herbs to make tea. The café infrastructure was also fully solar powered and collected rainwater stored in tanks. And finally, filmic documentation of the café atmosphere harvested two- and three-dimensional imagery for later use.

The café practice by its very nature entailed direct and immediate biofeedback: where the 'yields' *obtained* often occurred in situ. Our guests smiling over mulled wine, a ground coffee or dessert made for instant yields, whilst the enabling of longer term projects via forums of conversation, being visited by permaculture design course participants, and the reflection process upon change provided more deliberative moments where the yield obtained was longer term.

Self-regulation and feedback came in the form of reflection upon both in situ feedback and theoretical critique. In considering the suggestion to move the café to the community hall for instance, in situ feedback afforded me the opportunity to deliberately consider the elements most generative of the project's core vitality.

The project did *use and value renewable resources*: in terms of solar power, stored tank water, and the use of recycled materials wherever possible. Also, the compost generated fed the herb garden and fruit trees that generated the café's consumable produce. And the sharing of foodstuffs provided the forum for cultivating social engagement. The community itself was another renewable resource that we utilised as much as possible. And we encouraged participants to utilise the project as much as possible too. In this way, participants could experience relational engagement directly:

in a context designed to enhance the means and freedom to engage, and contribute to ongoing potentials for community enrichment.

It was a conscious objective within the café *not to produce waste*. Any objects used needed to be recyclable. Kitchen scraps went to compost. And any leftover foodstuffs were shared with neighbours. Signage was made from recycled paper and wood. Communication was electronic. And no mugs were purchased, or shall ever go to waste, as on completion of the project people took their own mugs back home. The problem of not having enough mugs turned into the defining feature of the café.

We travelled *from patterns to details* when the café evolved from a broader concept to a practical manifestation via practice. As a family, we launched into the project with willingness to adapt—and consider what works and what does not—along the way.

Integrating rather than segregating was a key principle to follow. There was no café before MugWall in Lorinna, and no gallery either. But there was a definite observable pattern of people coming together to socialise over coffee and cake. The phenomenon is not a new one, and doesn't seek to be. Rather, we sought an integral experience as a means to generate alter-narrative experience by the creation of an art-space social-practice café, within an existing lived-in private house. The café integrated our private lives with those of the community participants, and our mutual needs. And the café operated as an inclusive place in which, via informal meetings, local people of any type could better integrate.

Using slow and small solutions was the result of the project's evolution. Originally I sought to achieve large-scale projects: addressing issues of political or infrastructural importance, such as road access to the valley. But the café project, which came about, felt most right in simply providing a platform for informally discussing emergent information and experiences between participants. Whilst the café as an ongoing operation was a considerable undertaking, it also slowed us down enough to perceive the foundational connections the café provided with every other project. We did not convert our home into an elaborate professional bakery or pastry shop. We instead provided a humble lived space, and a staple offering of a biscuit and cake, with recipes that varied weekly and people appreciated simplicity of choice, with care in preparation.

With the *use of diversity*, we learnt *to value* this principle. The café offered a severally diverse environment, including by default. Our family comes from a multicultural Croatian-German-Hungarian-Jewish background. Whilst we are Buddhist, we also draw strongly upon a secular Hungarian folk tradition. Our cakes are selected from Hungarian and various 'European' recipes. And our café guests have been as diverse as the community itself. WOOFERs and other multinationals frequently visited too, accompanied by host families and the MugWall provided a space to engage diversity.

We *used the edges* while *valuing the marginal* within the café. The counter served as an iconic form of edge, providing a 'threshold' from which to marginally observe as artist,

and newcomer, and within a newly invented—and hence marginal—space. But the ‘edges’ need not allude to the literal or the artist position here, as the inclusivity of the environment actively encouraged a spectrum of visitors, opinions and modes of participation, and welcomed ‘outsiders’ whose experience was inherently marginal.

MugWall itself was a *creative response* to the potential *for change*, as well as to the change that our presence as artist-family-researcher represented. And when bushfire forced a communal evacuation into the former school buildings in Penguin for two weeks, on the morning of our regular café day, a pop-up café served as a normalising feature of consolation: bringing the community together—in a moment of radical change—with the assurance of regular belonging and feelings of home.

MUGWALL AS NARRATIVE SPACE

A home is always a place that situates home-life narratives. And, in opening up our private home to the community, our family story newly connected to the streams of local alter-narrative community life. Inviting the community into our home was not solely my design or decision alone as my family were active collaborators. Together, we talked about potential scenarios in detail, and their enthusiasms were both formative and decisive. Once agreed, we continued to work as co-creators: each providing creative input, contributing practically to work, and participating to make the café what it became. We became, as Muller describes, the ‘artist as family’ where our joint work was ‘a celebration of the resilience and creativity of family life’ (Muller 2010, p. 14).

The house where we lived and ran the café was rented, and perhaps the temporary tenancy arrangement made it easier to open up our private home as we had to come to accept our home and the enveloping artwork as being the stories we live, and might carry with us. This attitude and ‘artist as family’ way of life is also, as Muller describes, ‘a political statement about the value and purpose of art as a generative force for change’ (2010, p. 14).



Figure 16: Tamas Oszvald, *MugWall Social Café*, interior, 2016, digital image. Photograph by Tamas Oszvald.

Lorinna families often brought WOOFERs and other guests into the café and, as a whole-community invitation, the café offered unpredictable meeting opportunities within a familiarising context. Intense and unusual discussions were welcomed within the space. A visiting WOOFER brought up the subject of consensual polyamory for instance, raising beliefs about belonging and the nature of relationships. At other times local residents raised equally interesting debates amongst one another. The space also enabled other related social permaculture projects to be contextually discussed, and further developed. A regular guest suggested that the MugWall Café environment works as a vibrant space *because* our home is not what would regularly be considered appropriate for such an activity as, to begin with, the space is too small for the twenty-plus visitors that we frequently received at one time. And this obliges people to see each other, and meet on closer terms. Another resident criticised the home location, suggesting that the Community Hall would better serve and accommodate everyone—as that is the type of purpose it is maintained for.

As a family, we gave the Community Hall idea some thought. But for practical and conceptual reasons, these contemplations consolidated our reasoning to host MugWall at home. In our home, everything we needed was at hand and, when things got busy, our children were free to occupy themselves within their own environment. And conceptually, an alternative space would have developed an entirely different dynamic: one that is not nearly so closely proximate; on the edge of public and personal or, as the first guest had pointed out, a space of unplanned conversations and the inherent opportunities that stem from curiosity.

As a both private and public space, the MugWall flourished within what permaculture systemically describes as the edge phenomena: where ‘the interface between two ecosystems represents a third, more complex, system which combines both’ (Mollison 1988, p. 14). At such interfaces, ‘species from both systems can exist, and in many cases the boundary also supports its own species’ (Mollison 1988, p. 14). By combining our ‘Artist as Family’, the café provided a means to interface public and private ‘species’; local people with strangers; and the familial with the marginal and unexpected. The café as system juxtaposed multiple alter-narrative situations, and in this way provided a forum for both preparing the groundwork for complimentary concurrent projects as well as for the social practice to occur as an organically integrated whole.

The point of the project—in being the outcome of an integral mindset—was therefore not to strive independently for originality in its own right, but to instead reinterpret what already existed in Lorinna, until the ‘art’ could fully integrate with everyday social life and to hence find purpose in ways to serve the socio-cultural and personal needs within the community.

As discussed, the *MugWall Social Café* did not run through the principles numerically as a means to deliberately innovate a project design, but rather operated as a holistic mindset, which reveals the influence of each principle most clearly upon reflection. Therefore, the objective was to not only personally imbue principles as a living experience in order to singularly produce a socially engaged artwork, but to also

promote the use of such principles within and across the community as a means to effect communally enhancing modes of change.

SECTION 3 – Reconstructed Narratives – Relocated Assessment Exhibition

'It is not an exhibition, but a storytelling'

Evaluation of participatory art practices is difficult to define or prescribe, as the success of a project is not easily measureable. The community change that such work can generate is for the most part invisible and difficult to prove. This project, as part of a higher degree by research, was required by institutional and legal frameworks to be examined and assessed. However, participatory community based artwork opens up only through phenomenology, emphasizing the experiences of those who were present, and the learning that occurred through those experiences. Claire Bishop in *Artificial Hells* discusses the challenge of evaluating community based art practice:

It tends to value what is invisible: a group dynamic, a social situation, a change of energy, a raised consciousness. As a result, it is an art dependent on firsthand experience, and preferably over a long duration (days, months or even years) (2012, p. 9.).

This situation would seem to suggest that only those who have the opportunity for firsthand experience would be in a situation to truly evaluate a community-based engagement project. But within this project, that requires assessment by law, how might this be achievable? I could only imagine the question be fully answered by somewhat extreme situations where for instance a) the community members were given the authority to be my examiners, or b) the examiners move in to the community for the duration of the project. Although the prospect of either (or some combination of both) of these scenarios would have greatly appealed to me, it was clear that I needed to come to a compromise solution. I wanted to avoid re-representation of the project as far as possible. Upon my request, the University of Tasmania had initially made an exception in allowing the examination to happen in Lorinna, and to be based upon a situated understanding of the work that takes into account the likes of sensory data, and perceptions of the people and place of Lorinna. I felt Bishop's truth within my skin about how easy it would have been for me to misrepresent the project if it were taken out of its relevant physical context. Bishop says 'The complexity of each context and the characters involved is one reason why the dominant narratives around participatory art have frequently come to lie in the hands of those [...] responsible for each project and who are often the only ones to witness its full unfolding' (2012, p. 9.).

But on a rainy day, on the night of 5 June 2016, everything about the context of the project's examination was forced to change. I was one of the last people to drive across the Oliver's Creek Bridge in Lorinna, before a few hours later, devastating floodwaters collapsed the bridge, and washed away the passable segments of River Road. The floods determinedly cut off the only access to the community, as well as my plans for

an in situ assessment of my community engaged art practice and research (For a detailed map see Appendix 6).

So, the flood demanded a new situation and creative response to change. But the relocation of my assessment also came to represent a stimulating opportunity to resolve the final presentation in ways that might do the project more good than harm. The accident of inaccessibility did for instance, bring the project presentation into a serendipitous clearer form: as the storytelling and narrative elements of the project became more central to how it was finally communicated.



Figure 17: The washed away Olivers Creek bridge, 2106. Photograph by Annie Lorinna

Permaculture teaches us that if we look, the parameters of problems contain their own solutions. In the case of finalizing my project, I came to interpret this to mean that if the examiners could not visit the contextualized story of the work, the story of the work had to be taken to them. Thus, the investigation developed one final plot twist - as the contextual narrative had to be retold in a story form: becoming in this way a narrative project whose own story had to be told.

The problem as I saw it was two fold. Firstly I had to resolve how to provide presentation visitors with a sense of a place, and only through a storied retelling of place.

In answering this question came others, such as how could I make the work available away from the place to which it belongs? And how do I avoid simply producing new

artworks for exhibition? The answer seemed to be to make the exhibition a continuance and exemplar of how the work was practiced anyway – that is, through hermeneutically engaged, narratively woven storytelling, and with the available documentations and source materials (objects, video footages, images, literature, newspapers, court records, fieldwork notes, and a range of secondary and philosophical sources) deliberately assembled together. This appeared to work, as one examiner noted: ‘The exhibition design and culture of the gallery ensured that this was a safe and focused space. It was, in essence, a designed experience. And this was invaluable to the project.’ (Examiner 2 2016, p.2)

Secondly I was faced with the problem of how to tell the story of the work, without destructive potentials for misconstruction. As it turned out, the answer to this problem came from the community members themselves. Seeing my hesitation over how to recreate a truthful, yet designed experience of the work, numerous local people offered to become collectively present at the final ‘exhibition’. They offered openness to discussion, involvement in the assessment process, and to be available for observation and interaction with the examiners. By offering gallery visitors the ‘off site’ sharing of introductions, experiences, cake and tea, the hope was to make it possible for visiting examiners to immersively connect with the context of the work through the continuity of experience about it. And as one of the examiners noted in her comments: ‘the discussion elicited candid analysis of the project by those participants I ‘had tea with’.’ (Examiner 1 2016, p.1)

By providing frank discussion, community members extended reciprocity from within the research engagement into another site and context – and in fact, into another ontology within the gallery, and to another ‘outsider’. Their narrative recounted activities as story, but also offered deep reflections upon the complexities of community engagement, and the impact of the research intervention. After experiencing the initial buzz that came from the realization of the shared and carefully planned examination structure, we offered the examiners some hours alone to experience the space in privacy. While present, we tried to guide them toward the essence of that special mental place of our shared phenomenological engagement - by providing what we hoped were sufficiently effective fragments and signposts to enable our visitors to create an interpretive path of their own. One examiner responded: ‘As the rain poured down outside, I could imagine if I was in Lorinna, every care in social details like these would amplified.’ (Examiner 1 2016, p.1) So I am grateful to the community who enormously helped make this exhibition succeed.

Looking back on this project now, I can also see that the relocation of the exhibition also created a means to test the original framework and method of the exegesis. The exhibit was conducted using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach and point of view; where the ultimate integrity of the design depended upon our capacity to retain the holism and openness of attitude that was characteristic to our broader project in ‘social permaculture’.

In preparing to present a project that does not lend itself well or easily to exhibition though, the question does arise of how to decide when ‘enough’ is done for the project to be successfully translated across distinctive contexts. From the examiners’ point of view, the aim was to demonstrate my skills: in socially-engaged art; in my capacity for independent and systematic engagement in critical reflection; in my ability to develop and apply research methods that in some way extend existing knowledge; and in apply my skills as a research practitioner in ways that demonstrate autonomy and responsible practice within the arts. But my concern regarding the community’s point of view was that I simply wanted them to enjoy themselves. The only urgent organizational question relating to community member participation was addressing the matter of how to house them affordably. Due to the special floodwater circumstances that led to the relocated work, the university and Student Union jointly came to me financial aid with rental housing for one month. Fortunately, the rental that became available for me was a typical Launceston four bedroom house with additional living room capacity, so I boldly invited all the participants from Lorinna with the hope that at least ten people might come. And in the end, thirty three people from five families squeezed into the one-time palatial space – squatting on mattresses and sleeping bags - to share three days of cohabitant pre-exhibition housing together, as part of the adventure.



Figure 18: Tamas Ozsvald, *Assessment Exhibition*, 2016, SAWTOOTH Gallery, digital image. Photograph by Tamas Ozsvald.

The exhibition experience within the Sawtooth gallery itself is something I shall describe by means of a summary walking tour. For the list of artworks see Appendix 5.

Sawtooth ARI is an Artist Run experimental gallery in Launceston, committed to providing an affordable contemporary artist led space that also provides expansive creative experiences and monthly exhibitions within the broader community. Sawtooth showcases work by local, interstate and international artists at a variety of stages in their professional career. The gallery is located at the first floor of former industrial building, with entry up by a single staircase. And for my project exhibit, the top of these stairs is where the original 'MugWall Social Café' sign welcomed them. We were provided two spaces for the exhibition; including the Foyer entranceway and a semi-darkened Projection Room.

The first wall panel at the Foyer explained the work's dislocation from the context, and was placed before themed introductory wall panels with assembled documentation and selected objects, images, textual materials, and fieldwork notes that aimed to provide context for the work and stir curiosity within the viewer. From left to right, the collated theme-work pieces shared fragments about: Lorinna, Art theory, MugWall Gallery, Storytelling, Rituals, Vision Statement, Relocated Assessment details, and Social Media Posts accumulated as a vital medium within the research process.



Figure 19: Tamas Oszvald, *Assessment Exhibition*, 2016, SAWTOOTH Gallery, digital image.
Photograph by Tamas Oszvald.

On the opposite wall, four video narrative works provided a relational and intimate illustration of my experience as the artist-researcher, and the process of pulling the elements of the exhibition together. There was a short documentary about the project – made by *Lonely Oak Film* and *Imaging* and three of my own documentary videos with soundscapes and interviews that resulted from collaboration with ABC Northern Tasmania. Under the monitors, eight hand-painted boards of the Vision Statement project were leaned against a wall.

At the far corner of the exhibition space, and upon community request, the MugWall Social Café was running: with relocated equipment including our teapot, coffee percolator, teas and coffee, freshly made cakes and cookies and even sandwiches for the community and examiners to share. Also, the MugWall shelf was hung with member's mugs; and the mug-shot slideshow played on a tablet, sharing familiar signs below.

Finally the project's web page and Facebook page could be accessed on a desktop computer, offering supporting documentation.

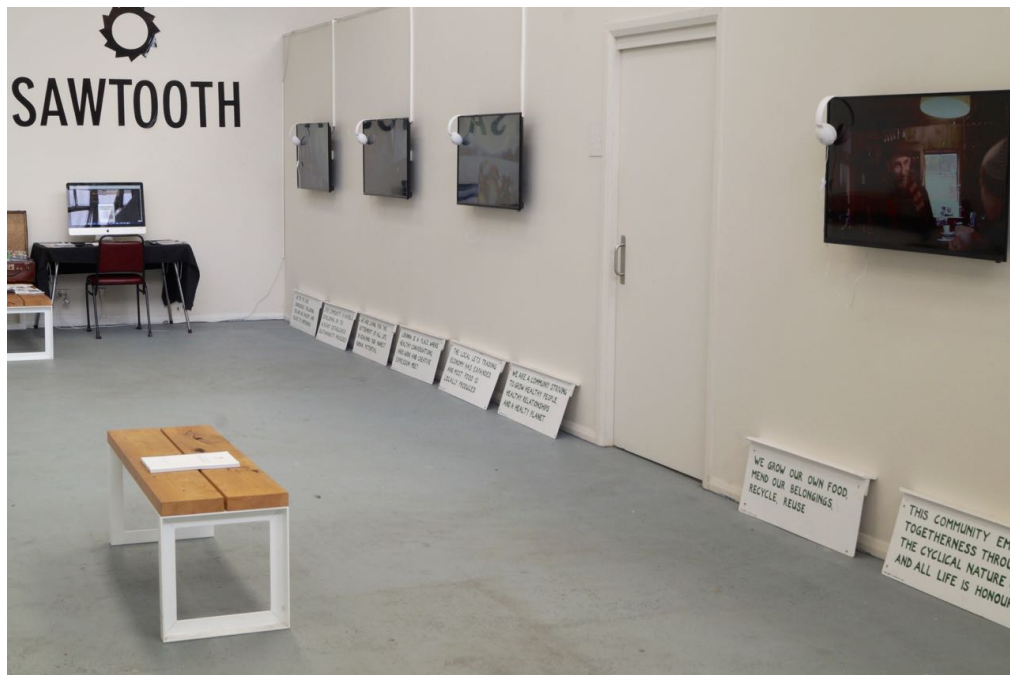


Figure 20: Tamas Oszvald, *Assessment Exhibition*, 2016, SAWTOOTH Gallery, digital image. Photograph by Tamas Oszvald.

In the Projection Room, a video installation aimed to create a particularly reflective space after the busy and didactic engagement area of the Foyer. The space was also intended for community expression: with chalk on the blackened walls, and a rest place for children and families to sit on pillows and be calmed by forest and rising water images, and meditative sound. A second film (*I am consented*) offered reflections on institutional procedures and process, and engaged gently with the subject matter of ethical negotiations within community and art engagement processes. This video about consent was the only additionally created work for the exhibit, and was made prior to final assessment venue changes. Originally, it was to have been projected in the Lorinna Community Hall.



Figure 21: Tamas Oszvald, *Assessment Exhibition*, 2016, SAWTOOTH Gallery, digital image. Photograph by Tamas Oszvald.



Figure 22: Tamas Oszvald, *Assessment Exhibition*, 2016, SAWTOOTH Gallery, digital image. Photograph by Tamas Oszvald.



Figure 23: Tamas Oszvald, *Assessment Exhibition*, 2016, SAWTOOTH Gallery, digital image. Photograph by Tamas Oszvald.



Figure 24: Tamas Oszvald, *Assessment Exhibition*, 2016, SAWTOOTH Gallery, digital image. Photograph by Tamas Oszvald.

CONCLUSION of Part Two

Within the first chapter of PART TWO, (or Chapter 4), the ethical principles of permaculture are revisited in the context of Lorinna practice-led engagement research. Within ethical praxis, the role of the artist came to function as a form of community facilitator: who unveils issues of import with sensitivity; enables opportunities for collaborative discourse; encourages participants to propose and develop articulation of ethical feelings; and ultimately aims for inclusive opportunities for growth, learning, and evolving participation within complexity.

Ethical method is best understood as an experimental art practice: in which social permaculture as an established mindset, and phenomenological hermeneutics, combine into living tools that define 1. the form of participant-observation in context, and 2. refine the role and 'character' of the artist. The theoretical framework simultaneously establishes a method that is a way of life, and a research practice that enables research findings to unfold and be communicated.

The services provided as a storyteller and performer within the Lorinna community (Chapter 5), established an interchangeable role between being an internal participant and an external observer - who brought tales from near and faraway (Benjamin 2006). This service created an 'entry-point' for situating as a researcher, familial resident, and cultural practitioner within the Lorinna community; as well as providing me with an evolving tool of social permaculture engagement practice and design. This concept is best exemplified within the fieldwork art projects; including the Vision Statement and the MugWall Social Café. These works came to operate (and only make full sense) within a holistic mindset: in which the social application of permaculture principles can be seen most clearly upon hermeneutic reflection, rather than by step-wise modes of linear analysis.

Such reflection requires the practitioner to integrate feedback of many kinds (positive, negative and otherwise), and many forms (including from participants or the physical environment). And such integration is what provides the creative platform for practice. The 'unexpected' is both a requirement and an inevitability in such engagements: as it moves the participants (including the artist), out of conventional being and into the vital potentials of everyday praxis.



Figure 25: Tamas Oszvald, *Assessment Exhibition*, 2016, SAWTOOTH Gallery, digital image. Photograph by Tamas Oszvald.

CHAPTER 6 – Findings And Conclusion: The Narrative as (re)telling observations

Within this chapter I seek to present findings in social permaculture in the form and propositions for the ongoing re-writing of narrative in which the participant-observing practitioner is encouraged to continuously re-write and re-tell situated narratives in an ever evolving context. Here, hermetic receptivity to environmental engagement benefits community engaged art practitioners by embracing immersive and ongoing challenges in place of temporally defined performances of ‘trickery’.

My original plan for this project was much more conventional than what eventually came about. Intending to follow the more usual practice of community-based art, I had sought to initiate a handful of projects, as allowed by the fieldwork timeframe, and then utilise the systemic methods of permaculture to resolve these. What I expected to find was a way to build my projects around the community issues, problems and situations that my observations would inevitably unveil—and then address these in a pointwise fashion, by drawing upon the list of permaculture principles—and attending to them metaphorically as one might tend to a garden, or need for design.

However, permaculture turned out to have a much more infiltrating impact upon my thinking than I had anticipated. The fluid holism and overarching capacity of permaculture offered a paradigmatic shift to both how I operated and to what I understood the ‘practical’ in permaculture to be. Subsequently, my neatly orchestrated project thinking became loose, and less clearly connected. And I faced very real prospects that they would become theoretically unsubstantiated and float away.

But just as permaculture became much more conceptual to me, the practice of permaculture as a lived way of thinking became an authentic preference over the option of using permaculture as one might use a more linear tool. And I began to recognise the potentially more powerful interpretive possibilities in interpreting permaculture as a means to a lived experience, in which the whole-life experience became the ‘art’.

In the context of research, this lived experience had implications. If the experience became the art, then the ‘art’ embraces the central *artworks*, but is not encompassed by them. Rather the art as experience embraces the whole of the project, project processes and material outcomes, just as each of these stems from and reflect engagements with community in various forms. The ‘art’ can be said to be ultimately reached within the ongoing engagements within Lorinna community—indistinguishable from concept developments that came out of experimental project making, the evolving role of the artist, and the central ‘artwork’ itself. As such, community interactions, documentation and creative work see creative practice, work and archive collapse into one.

Although I do not have a naturally theoretical disposition there are, however, parameters of research by which I am required to abide and which, in order to remain authentic, have become narrative threads within this holistic mode of social engagement 'work as research'. The formality of language; the categorical nature of situating the work in a field of practice; and the mode of reflection upon 'outcomes' have all become elements which influence what and how I observe, document, creatively interpret, and communicate layers of meaning. The academic domain of research has presented me with specific challenges to practice, that by multiple processes of revision and (re)definition might also, I hope, bring a credible opportunity to rethink the language and critique of alter-narratives, and to provoke investigation into how such critique practically plays out amongst other alter-narrative modes of practice.

PERMACULTURE AS PRAXIS

My reasons for being interested in making art based on permaculture principles are several. Like every permaculture practitioner I have come to know of, the attraction stems from concerns about the global environment; a desire for a healthy basis of local community; and a wish to empower people to creative actions that enhance alternative ways of life and enable positive social and environmental improvements to come to fruition.

Currently, there is no shortage of information about the likes of environmental crises. But as Zimmer (2015) puts it, the current zeitgeist presents as a period of experiencing 'awareness without power'. There is widespread awareness for instance that our social actions contribute to the state of the environment. But in reality, there is no such distinction between nature and culture, local and global spheres. They are connected. And permaculture offers both a means to picture 'the world' more holistically as well as a means to engage people in systemic local actions that empower new culture to develop whilst embracing individual differences as a social-ecological form of asset.

Whilst I found that permaculture can indeed inspire art projects that enhance, and cultivate new forms of community, community objectives cannot be achieved from one source alone. It is also essential to obtain examples that demonstrate the means to establish a thoroughly *lived* connection amongst a developing community as key resources, and to draw upon the referenced examples of inclusive practice from other practitioners and disciplines so as to create your own. It is also important to bear in mind that art in socially engaged art practice inevitably involves a degree of teaching in order to enable non-traditional art methods to be contextually understood and to provide the required entry points for audiences without formal backgrounds in these areas.

Permaculture, as both a grass roots DIY culture and a system, is highly adaptable. Every environment is observed to collect knowledge, in order to place this knowledge within the observed localised context. As a permaculture garden builds humus in an organic process for gardening, within social practice a comparable building up of

groundwork is also required. To an extent, this analogy holds: as agricultural processes destroy soil vitality, the social deconstruction of relations can be held to be unethical if vitality in the process is destroyed. Within my practice I have found permaculture, as an embodied way of thinking, far more fruitful than imposing a systemic outlook to merely superimpose upon multiple projects. This finding came directly from periods of (pre)observation and (re)observation: that whilst taken in an analogous way from specific permaculture garden design technique, also marries with the approach undertaken by other social engagement practitioners in the field such as Alfredo Jaar, who recommends an observation phase of no less than a year.

Making the distinction between (pre)observation and (re)observation through interaction—as opposed to reading the first principle of permaculture as ‘observation and interaction’—has also helped me to understand the observation process as an integral one, in the context of participant observation.

I would recommend as necessary completing a Permaculture Design certificate before commencing permaculture-inspired research. Also necessary, I would suggest, is taking on board permaculture as a way of life in which ethics are lived, as opposed to the predominant mode of institutional ethics, which apply largely in a preventative function. And whilst the socio-political applications of permaculture require more creative *innovations* than they do literal *applications*, the objective is ultimately to provide people with tools for living.

But whilst social applications require some innovations within problem solving, there are broader lessons of adaptability that I have found clearly to apply.

- Permaculture as a holistic system always requires a focal point. So in the social engagement context, where no obvious focal point exists, it is necessary to invent one.
- ‘The margins’ in permaculture are held to be the most ecologically valuable resource. In a social context, I’ve found such ‘threshold’ margins to exist most readily where public and private spheres meet. Also, at the edges of social discourse, the means can be found to both deepen thinking, and challenge stultifying traps within analysis.

As an adaptable resource, permaculture as social practice also benefits from the discourse of other disciplines. As ecological art often draws upon expertise from fields within science, I have found holistic practice-led research to be a good match with hermeneutic philosophy for instance, which helped me identify relatable liminal artist roles—and to integrate these—into a methodology. This helps to situate a practice in theory, as well as to manifest in practice.

THE HERMETIC CHARACTER OF THE ARTIST

Metaphorically taking on the role of Hermes, from hermeneutic phenomenology, provides another basis for understanding the artist as a liminal type of personality:

where the role of a ‘trickster’ is ideally not to shock or shake audiences—as with antagonistic forms of practice—but rather to become increasingly adaptable in order to translate multiple narratives, and thus to become a stronger facilitator of cultural ideas.

Likewise, the artist-participant is not a social worker, but rather a mediator who seeks to pick up upon the nuances of multiple subjective spaces. The artist continually evolves as each project involves independently defined objectives that, in practice, entail inherent subjective social differences of their own.

The oscillations between externally imposed objectives, and participating in subjective space, reflect the liminal insider-outsider hermetic artist identity. It is an experience of continual fluctuation in between perspectives. Being embedded within the situation is necessary: to become immersed in the ever-shifting context so essential to learning the nuances of local meanings, and to become ever more attuned to the essence of place. The hermeneutic approach to participation, however, involves a shared journey of the artist and the participants. Personal transformation—and hence a form of ‘spiritual’ practice—becomes culturally embedded, and the community ‘development’ occurs amongst peers.

The experience is holistic, and not distinctly categorical by nature as the experience is a constant attitude of learning, openness and change, and the role of the artist is served by not being distinct from a ‘role’ as a human being. There are strong and recurring utopian underpinnings to such a practice. But this research does not claim that art, or permaculture (social or otherwise), can ‘save the world’ in sweeping grand-scale steps. Rather, social practice—and in particular social practice as based upon principles from permaculture—presents alter-narrative platforms, which enable multiple voices to be heard. And that *is* the activism of this type of social engagement.

THE TOOL (THAT IS NOT A TOOL)

Having said what social art that draws upon permaculture is, I also need to clearly state what it is *not* in this research. The use of permaculture did *not* lead to a singular best form of practice, although a form of this was originally sought via a systemic use of permaculture principles. Nor did the use of permaculture lead to a clear alternate research method immediately. Methodology, in my case, clearly did evolve from practice: and from instinctive beginnings, concepts began to consolidate into written material, emerging in part from experimenting with pilot projects and ‘the artwork’, in retrospect.

The research process was an iterative, and evolving one. I was aware that interpretation was a creative endeavour, and never a neutral one. And as a storyteller, I came to describe the liminal hermeneutic artists’ role as an openness to ‘alter-narrative’ modes of expression. I found the identification of alter-narratives—as distinct from dominant discourse—a useful way to understand the role of permaculture within the research. The alter-narrative tools of permaculture, I found,

came in the end to serve the progression of observed and evolving local alter-narratives within Lorinna.

The application of permaculture principles themselves can be both literal and metaphoric upon practical demand, and several artwork features could be used to illustrate a number of principles. Such synthesis is a hallmark of permaculture practice that is neither limitless, fool-proof nor arbitrary, but rather a resolution of experimentation process based on multiple levels of feedback.

Within the permaculture design system, design centres upon a focal point from which concentric zones are successively defined. The centre for a residential-based design is the home, and all that surrounds it is zoned according to frequency of access and the need for maintenance. And, from the MugWall experience, I would suggest such a focal point in social permaculture could potentially be generated anywhere, given an appropriate timeframe in which to observe local phenomena, and experientially integrate.

A MODEL FOR PRAXIS (THAT IS NOT A MODEL)

In working with people, I deal not only with a form of subject matter in my practice, but also become socially embedded in situ. Participant feedback is thus both constant and immediate—which prevents my dreams from straying too far from lived reality, for too long. But both my practice and my practical management skills within this project were frequently challenged, and obliged me to reach further out for new ideas from different disciplines, to numerously experiment with these ideas, and to find new language to express my findings. A new *type* of ‘model’ needed to evolve.

The original intention was to use the twelve permaculture principles in an almost step-by-step way whenever a new project idea arose—emulating in parallel, the way the systemic approach to permaculture garden design *appears* to work. Such a garden always begins by spelling out a collective vision and observations, and mapping both what is observed and desired. And then, during the process of design, each principle is applied to an observed understanding of the ecosystem, whilst underlying *ethical* principles fundamentally serve the process.

In experimentally applying these ethical principles to my work, I developed a more visceral appreciation of the embedded organic-dynamics of permaculture: its adaptability, echo of—and *participation* within—biological life. The principles may appear as directive, but they have a way of infiltrating thinking via use—making it hard over time to distinguish between their *conscious* and *subconscious* use. When the principles are applied as maxims that permeate attitude, they became unavoidable acts of conscience, sometimes even to the point of annoyance. Tools are interchangeable. But a model built into consciousness cannot be abandoned quickly. It does grow, however, and *evolve* and nourish.

This process ‘from rules to attitude’ will no doubt occur differently by each practitioner, as practitioners themselves are an interactive part of the social ecology observed. Realisation of ‘attitude’ dawns as if by stealth. And, in my own practice, this experiential registration occurred *prior* to deeper theoretical conclusions or positioning. It was more like an a priori feeling of recognition, a perceptual glance into practically applicable forms of truth. Although it was necessary to shift the process into more qualitatively substantial directions, the personal reflection and intuitive states of experience were core, and necessary. The revised ‘model’ now comprises this attitudinal disposition: where the constant flux of a practitioner’s choices and actions are informed by a permaculture way of thinking. The pilot projects, which applied permaculture less holistically, did help guide my intuition towards the objective of more actively seeking out ‘small and slow solutions’, and to find a situation in which I might carry this out. Then, once I found—and became a part of—the community in Lorinna, I experienced real progress.

My four most central findings from the Lorinna ‘central artwork’ engagements sound deceptively simple but were by far the hardest aspects of the project to fully realise—and they now form the basis of my revised, non-prescriptive model, which reads:

1. Spend as much time in observation as is practicable.

The observation process, as mentioned, is key to both garden designs and social permaculture engagements. And this is a recurring process: it cannot be visited only once.

2. Find a personally intuitive way to transition from ‘tool’ to ‘attitude’.

The transition from ‘tool’ to ‘attitude’ in social permaculture is both necessary and needs to be as holistically complete as possible. The real benefits of applying permaculture to social engagement can then be encountered as an ecology, rather than producing work that is merely an alternative way to represent it. The goal is to be direct, and to be part of the system. And for this reason too, I found the hermeneutic method a particularly synchronous construct.

3. Live with, rather than work with, a community

From the special perspective of permaculture as an art practice, finding a way to live *with* (as opposed to simply *working* with) a community definitely enables a much deeper foundation for social practice.

4. Avoid ‘trickery’ and *practice* ‘small and slow solutions’.

Finally, the emphasis on ‘small and slow solutions’ is transformative to arts practice, and involves resisting the pressures to make more clearly apparent conclusions and resolved-seeming ‘products’ *faster*. This is also fundamental to the transition from tool to attitude as *there is no* prefabricated reference point to turn to in a genuinely open engagement with a newly observed social

ecology. A deeper understanding can only be reached by abandoning preconceptions and peremptory ideas and, hence, *slowing down*.

Whilst the revised model presents a distillation of those findings I found most fundamental, and revelatory to the development of the reinvented practice I was looking for, I still revisit the twelve principles of permaculture design often—as a tool of reflection, and also as a way to cultivate the shift from tool orientation to consciousness via processes of both familiarity and iteration in newly arising circumstances. As I have benefited from the specific examples of the practice of others, I include one final permaculture principle reflection, as a final summation in my practice.

REFLECTIONS ON PERMACULTURE DESIGN PRINCIPLES: FINAL (RE)OBSERVATIONS

As in the practical application of both narrative and hermeneutic concepts, permaculture requires our self-conscious acknowledgment that our understanding of the world relies upon our ongoing and actively interpreted experience. We need to ‘activate’ those subjects we observe, and the importance of interaction in this process is what led me to modify the first principle from ‘Observe *and* Interact’ to ‘observation *through* interaction’. The dynamics of phenomena appear when we interact with them, and this form of observation is always the starting point in any permaculture-based design, be that social, literal or, speculatively, otherwise.

There are multiple forms of energy entering to and from any system—including in social systems—even if such energies require alternate interpretations. Energy flows also entail observable patterns, which make it possible to harvest, use and store such energy from moments of abundance. Within a social system, information is one form of energy and, by processes of documentation, the artist stores what is observed for later communal use. It could be argued that an art project rendered in non-traditional media is also a form of energy, which flows into the communal understanding of what defines art. And this information is ‘stored’ for future interpretive use.

Within a community-based art project, a yield can be as simple as enjoying the moments that communal participation has inspired. Whilst communal happiness is certainly not the sole goal or indicator of a successful project, it is one among many legitimate factors in creating change that can nurture trust and essential relationships, and illustrate one potential type of moment that can be described as obtaining a yield. A yield can also be some form of new information or experience generated by the project. But the most important point about yields is that, whatever they are, they need to be actively appreciated, be that in situ; in deliberative slow moments of appreciation; or by celebratory markers that entail communal actions in their own right.

The practice of obtaining a yield also teaches the artist to step back, on a regular basis, from his or her own project—to obtain the yield from the world engaging the project.

This process not only enables an artist to periodically relax, but also to enhance their skill in regaining fresh eyes, contextually appropriate perspective, and the ability to discuss their project with other people. And as artists we should also share our yields with peers, to contribute to collective knowledge, and also to yield through the knowledgeable feedback of others.

Applying self-regulation and accepting feedback is a principle that suggests that to yield from feedback we need situated platforms in which that can occur. Cross-pollinating ideas need to be cultivated via artist acceptance as denials are more likely to generate half-truths.

In a community-based art project, the first and most obvious renewable resource is the community itself. The community predates the artist's involvement, and continues after an artist leaves. Within a successful project, community values will have been enhanced. And the more mindful a permaculture design, the better will be the condition of culturally renewable resources. As Nandor Tanczos puts it: 'it is worth bearing in mind that the social capital that research often relies on is a renewable resource in the sense that it regenerates and tends to grow with use' (2015).

As referred to within previous discussions of permaculture ethical principles, the design principle on cultivating renewable resources speaks not only of using existing resources internal to a community, but also introducing external resources from alternative sources. In the case of a material work: sources of recycled materials offer a simple example. In practical terms, producing no waste would entail steering clear of object making that would produce aesthetic material bound for the trash. And if object making is unavoidable, then the artist needs to consider the afterlife of any objects, and how they might be re-used, as well as how to avoid any environmentally toxic materials. All work should be ultimately recyclable. Nothing justifies using non-biodegradable produce. Any unnecessary pollution-producing travel needs to be reconsidered and communication with the community should consider electronic alternatives to single-purpose print material.

Thinking from patterns to details advises us not to be concerned about project minutiae from the outset. Once we have a big picture, the project vision will come, and over time reveal an appropriate starting point. Within the process of observation through interaction, the process becomes fine-tuned. But an approach to communicating about the project is crucial. Different audiences require different amounts and forms of information, and there is no singular pattern of interest. So the artist needs to be prepared for multiple depths of discussion that keeps communication inclusive. And communicating from pattern to detail is a good guide for introducing concepts, and unveiling more information as guided by questions when these arise.

Such an approach is also useful to handling online content for multiple audience use: where a clear overall concept can be presented with informal language—and links to

further theory, text and other resources can be provided for those seeking more and alternative forms of information.

In participatory practice, prioritising integration over segregation leads to a multiple-media practice, which emphasises connectedness over categorical distinctions. Local context and narratives become observational materials that are harnessed and interwoven, and existing social patterns become the situated context that, like a canvas, presents a delineating context in which to draw upon bounded forms of familiarity in which to engage participants with interventions. The principle of integration also speaks of inclusivity over alienation from artist practices. Sub-cultural differences are seen as materials for inclusion, and such inclusivity is often grounds for resistance as people strive to retain pre-established norms.

Interconnectedness, however, is what forms communal bonds. Whilst sometimes a project requires some basis of selectivity (in order for instance to enable otherwise silent voices to be heard), any such basis needs to be carefully managed and reflectively considered, with a view to adapt. The principle on inclusiveness then also refers to the relationship between the artist's life and the artist's work, where I would argue that in community-based projects the integration of the artist and work into the experientially lived community experience is necessary for building fundamental bonds of participatory trust.

This principle relating to small and slow solutions is one of the hardest for an artist to implement, as the temptation is to cave in to personal or institutional pressures, and fast-track ideas into action. But often, a small and slow change can have as much impact as a higher budget and rapid-fire intervention, once an artist has time to consolidate information about the local context. Smaller projects enable more immediate feedback and adaptive potential and running simultaneous smaller projects enables greater experimentation, as well as options on which to fall back.

The value of diversity to practice can apply to the production and experimentation with a number of projects, rather than one large, highly invested idea, as multiple projects free an artist to play, observe more diverse phenomena, and respond to changes, including those that occur within the artist's mind. Diversity of topics and approach also maximises the opportunities and likelihood of a broader base of participation. It is also important to pay attention to the diversity of participants, as even the most well-informed projects, with the best of intentions, are unlikely to include everyone in an artist's would-be target engagement audience. Observation periods are the most ideal way to try to identify more nuanced differences of perspective to these ends. And whilst not every artist can afford the privilege of a one-year observation time as taken by Alfredo Jaar, maximising the observation period as much as possible is a good investment of time.

Arguably, in terms of margins, the role of an artist in society is already a marginal one. But the role of an artist in participatory practice is even more marginal again because instead of defining the marginal as an identity particular to the artists themselves, a

social engagement requires a facilitation style that embraces the margins of the community membership in which the artist participates. Another element of the margins in social practice is the means by which the artist operates outside of institutional settings and commercial galleries, as even artists who exhibit (as I do) operate within a field isolated for the most part from art-educated audience settings. And within my research I found the engagements so fundamental as to constitute the 'art' itself, where experimental works and central artworks are subsumed by the engagements, and artworks are merely a bi-product of the 'art' as well as a means to share findings, personal creativity, and essential communications about the work.

The edge is where art meets everyday life, and is that liminal space where the most productive responses are born. This is not 'non-art art', but more like 'all-art art'. The edge offers a space where what is, and what is not, art are no longer distinguishable as categories bleed into one another and reinvent art with renewed vitality. Personally, I think it is a mistake to assume that the edges need be spaces of confrontation. Instead, the edge is where real life occurs, in real circumstances, and offers artists an opportunity for direct engagement where such engagement is, I believe, more politically effectual than representing issues to which attention needs to be drawn. Permaculture, as a design system seeking to emulate the integration of nature, does not highlight the edge as a separate entity but, rather, interprets the liminal spaces as entry and exit points, through which alternative systems flow.

The principle of embracing change carries with it the essence of the distinction between a community development project, and a community-engaged art project. Planned developments require pre-established rules and regulations to fit within an established system, whereas artists, on the contrary, have the advantage of a foundation of creative roles that liberate response. The changes to which an artist responds become included as core ingredients within the effected social ecology and these include changes that regularly occur within artists themselves.

For me, the central change within my practice was my mode of engagement with the hermetic role as this evolved. The imaginative characterisation of 'Hermes' as a metaphoric stand-in for the artist's role has been a recurring one. As an intermediary who travels between places, ideas and liminal spaces, the hermetic figure has been one, which has caught my imagination in alternating ways. He has been as a theatrical figure, whose 'tricks' performatively engage attention. And a figure—who, with an even greater and more mature imagination—might reach deeper engagement ground by proactively slowing down and stepping on the path of *untricking*.

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Appendix 1 – Vision Statement Form

Tasmanian College of the Arts

Vision Statement Project - Version 01 – 20 January 2016



Lorinna Community Vision Statement

This project is part of a PhD research of Tamas Oszvald within the Tasmanian College of the Arts, University of Tasmania that is investigating the adaptability of Permaculture Design methods in community engagement.

Your participation would be greatly appreciated, and will contribute the future understanding the use of permaculture as an artistic practice.

With gratitude, Tamas Oszvald, PhD candidate, UTAS.

In permaculture, a Vision Statement is a summary (consisting of just a few sentences) describing the landowner's vision of applied and established permaculture design to their property in five years time. It is written beforehand the designer even start to develop the design and serve as a symbolic guideline.

A Vision Statement created for an urban landscape design by the owners is provided below as an example and for inspiration:

Our welcoming place is a comfortable home and a productive garden with vegetables, fruiting trees and shrubs that provides a self-sufficient lifestyle for the whole family. The wide range of herbs and spices serve our enjoyment, eating from a range of different cultures and cuisines. Our garden was designed by clear, organic structures with wild areas on the edges; it is a home for the native birdlife, but also for our bees and our chooks. In the all year round flowering garden children move and play freely, it's a space for enjoyment, relaxation and escape.

Imagine your **community in 5 years** down the track. What does it look and feel like to you? How would you **describe** it to someone who's never been there before?

5 sentences is sufficient for at Goal Statement

This is a voluntary and anonym survey. The answers will not be identified with the respondent. Please read the 'Participant Information Sheet' document and sign the 'Participant Consent Form' paper provided by the candidate. The candidate intends to use the Vision Statements in an installation, where these statements will be painted on boards and placed out to different locations of Lorinna. Filling in this form and submitting it back to the candidate, is agreeing to your information being used (anonymously) publically.
to your information being used publically.

Appendix 2 – Vision Statements

The chosen sentences for installation are in bold and uppercase

1.

THE COMMUNITY IS RAPIDLY DEVELOPING ON ITS ALREADY ESTABLISHED SUSTAINABILITY PROCESSES in the face of a rapidly deteriorated Australian financial position and possible global war. The community has grown to close to the ideal size of 150 members. **THE LOCAL ECONOMY LETS TRADING ECONOMY HAS EXPANDED, AND MOST FOOD IS LOCALLY PRODUCED.** Lorinna Works has maintained Lorinna Road to basic trafficable standard, and members have jointly purchased equipment to maintain local roads and driveways. Car-pooling has developed, with more electric vehicles in the mix. Interested locals have purchased a property at Cethana or Gowrie Park to facilitate car-pooling and deliveries to Lorinna folk, and outside commitments of teens and young adults.

2.

WE ARE A COMMUNITY STRIVING TO GROW HEALTHY PEOPLE, HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS AND A HEALTHY PLANET.

3.

We live in natural, chemical free, bio-diversely managed surrounds with easy access to big tracks of wilderness. We are an economically resilient community of sustainable gardeners, farmers, small-scale enterprises and cottage industries. **WE ARE A COMMUNITY OF EMOTIONALLY MATURE, CUSP COMMUNICATORS.** We function as a sustainable village with fossil free transport, holistic health and Elder care, and vibrant market and cultural life. We work, create, play and share together.

4.

LIVING FOR THE BETTERMENT OF ALL LIFE IN REACHING OUR HIGHEST HUMAN POTENTIAL.

5.

I love being part of our engaged, vibrant, progressive community

We are united by a shared deep love of our natural environment.

We are a sustainably focused community.

We are aware, ethically minded individuals and try to leave a light footprint, upon our wild precious earth.

We live in innovative, unique, eco-sustainable homes, made from recycled, locally sourced, ecologically sound materials. Housing that blends into the environment with minimal ecological impact.

WE GROW OUR OWN FOOD, MEND OUR BELONGINGS, RECYCLE, REUSE.

We grow and share an abundance of locally grown, organic food.

Regeneration occurs of the denuded parts of the valley. The nature force is strong all around us.

I am part of a creative community and enjoy the many events held regularly that unite us; co-op, circus, cafe, music, shared meals, soccer, film nights, storytelling, book group, aikido, crafting, pizza nights, Harvest Feast... It is a rich social fabric that weaves us together.

We have a strong alternative local currency and trade goods and services.

As an inclusive, resilient community we respect our many differences and have a system of community support and mediation to help us work through conflicts that may arise.

We are compassionate and kind and this is reflected in the way we nurture ourselves, our children, our relationship with each other, the natural environment and all the animals, insects, fauna and parts it contains.

I feel blessed, inspired, and overwhelmingly grateful to be part of such a beautiful like-minded, ethical community. Our beautiful valley in the magic mountains.

6.

“A community grows great when elders *plant trees* whose shade they know they shall never sit in.” - inspired by a Greek *Proverb*.

We endeavour to sow the seeds of simplicity– a return to our ancient wise ways. Our lives are interdependent and full of abundance. Our children sing songs of empathic connections built upon resiliency. **THIS COMMUNITY EMBODIES TOGETHERNESS THROUGHOUT THE CYCLICAL NATURE OF LIFE AND ALL LIFE IS HONOURED.** We live the change we desire to see within the world.

7.

Lorinna is a diverse 'off-the-grid' community, nourished by good locally grown food and sustained by looking out for each other. **WE TRY TO LIVE CONSCIOUSLY, INCLUDING THE WAY WE PARENT AND RELATE TO DIFFERENCE.**

LORINNA IS A PLACE WHERE HEALTHY CONVERSATIONS, HARD WORK AND CREATIVE EXPRESSION MEET.

Appendix 3 – Story from the Panchatantra

The Mouse, the Crow, the Turtle and the Deer

– Once upon a time four good friends lived in the forest near a lake. The Mouse, the Crow, the Turtle and the Deer. They met every day to drink at the lake and to talk and to share stories.

One day the Deer did not come to the lake to drink water, so his friend the Mouse, the Crow and the Turtle were worried.

They were all different but they all have their own special strength and the Turtle was the smartest. He said:

– Go Crow, fly up high over the forest and look around if you see anything unusual or if you see our friend the Deer. I am afraid that the Deer might be hurt.

The Crow flew over the forest. It took only moments before the Crow saw the Deer caught in a trap made of ropes. She flew back right away to tell her friends what did she see.

– Oh, oh what can we do now, the hunter will come soon and we will not see our dear friend, the Deer again... What can we do?

But the Turtle said:

– Let me think... yes I know! You Mouse has strong teeth, and you Crow can fly fast as the wind. Take the Mouse on your back and fly over to the trap. You Mouse chew the ropes and our friend will be saved!

– What a great idea – they both agreed.

After the Mouse arrived on the back of the Crow, he began to chew the ropes with her teeth. Crow pecked at the ropes with his beak.

They worked really hard and finally slowly but surely the Turtle arrived too and started to calm down the frightened Deer.

But the Deer asked the Turtle:

– Why did you come here?

– Friends are supposed to help each other – said Turtle.

– We are your friends and we came to help you escape the Hunter's trap.

They just destroyed the trap when the Hunter came.

– Everyone leaves quickly – said Turtle.

So the Crow flew away fast. The Deer ran down the path. The Mouse ran into a little hole to hide. But the Turtle was so slowly hardly made even one step when the Hunter arrived.

– My trap is empty and broken! – said the hunter.

– How could it be? What kind of Turtle are you? Anyway, a Turtle is better than nothing. I will eat Turtle soup tonight!

The Hunter put the Turtle in sack, he tightened the mouth of the sack and started for home.

The friends came fourth and they were very sad.

– What will we do now? – asked the Deer.

– What will our wise friend the Turtle would do? – asked the Crow.

– We have to make a plan quickly and save our friend! – suggested the Mouse.

– I can run fast to get ahead of the Hunter – said the Deer – and lay down on the path pretending to be hurt!

– I can fly ahead of the hunter and landing on Deer's head pretending I am eating!

– And I can travel again on the Crows back and while he is after the Deer I can chew the rope of the sack and free our friend the Turtle!

So they did.

The Hunter saw the Deer with the Crow on her head. He put his sack down to go and get the Deer. As quickly as the Hunter left the Turtle, the Mouse ran up and cut the ropes off the sack.

The Turtle and the Mouse stepped off the path to hide in the forest. The Crow flew away and the Deer got up and ran fast to escape the Hunter.

The Hunter went back to get at least the Turtle, but he found just an empty sack.

– There is magic at work here – he said to himself. I would do better to get out from here as soon as I can! – Then he ran out of the forest to never come back again. And because he told his story to the villagers, after this day nobody ever disturbed the animals of that forest, and they named that place the Forest of the Magic Turtle.

– Was there any real magic in the forest that day? Yes, of course and that magic is called friendship. May you always be blessed with the magic that comes from having good friends!

Appendix 4 – List of the outputs and sites of engagement

Lorinna

MugWall Social Café between 1 January 2016 and 28 August 2016, every Sunday 12pm-6pm (between 10am and 6pm in the first 4 month). 12 Ladybird Lane, Lorinna, Tasmania, Australia.

Storytelling events at various occasions in Lorinna from December 2013.

Performances at various occasions in Lorinna from April 2014.

Rituals at Spring and Autumn Equinox and Summer and Winter Solstice between June 2015 – September 2016.

Vision Statement, installation of 9 hand painted boards in Lorinna, between 29 August and 31 August 2016.

Inclusive Lorinna Googlegroup mailing list

The project was communicated through the existing Lorinna residents' mailing list. This mailing list includes 80 % of the locals. The mails were used as a way to collect data, share information and to seek feedback within the community. It was also used as one of the major sites of the discussion of the application of permaculture principles in community engaged approaches.

Facebook

Social media was used as a way to collect data, share information and to seek feedback within the community. It also worked as the primer media to communicate the project to a wider audience. As the posts were not exclusive (not a closed group) it reached a wide audience and till this moment it gets new views, followers and likes. Facebook was also used as one of the major sites of the discussion of the application of permaculture principles in community engaged approaches. Address: <https://www.facebook.com/mugwallcafe/>

Wordpress webpage

The web page was designed and actively used to provide up-to-date information about my research with textual and visual content. It was operated in an earlier format and address from January 2013 and in the recent format from January 2016. The web page will stay online to share the details of the investigation. Address: <https://oszvaldt.wordpress.com/>

Sawtooth ARI Gallery

Relocated assessment exhibition. 29-30 September 2016.

Workshop for the Lorinna residents who were presented at the gallery with TasDance artistic director Felicity Bott. The workshop's aim was to familiarize the community members with the new space and facilitate to create an ownership. 28 September 2016.

Appendix 5 – List of exhibited works

Foyer Space

Archive Assemblage – documentation on walls. From left to right: Lorinna, theory, MugWall Gallery, storytelling, rituals, Vision Statement project, MugWall Social Café social media posts. (ca. 2m x 8m)

Vision Statement Boards (set of 8, 40cm x 90cm each).

Videos (set of 3) - interviews with Lorinna residents (duration is vary: 3-5 minutes).

Video - documentary with Tamas Oszvald, by Lonely Oak Film and Imaging (duration: 00:02:54).

MugWall Café reconstructed and operating – shelf of mugs, mug-shots on small screen, coffee, tee, food, people (mixed media).

Projection Room:

Video - I am consented (duration: 00:05:37).

Video – Untitled (Lakeside / Snowy forest) (duration: 00:07:35).

Black wall with chalk drawings (ca. 3m x 15m)

Appendix 6 – Map of Lorinna

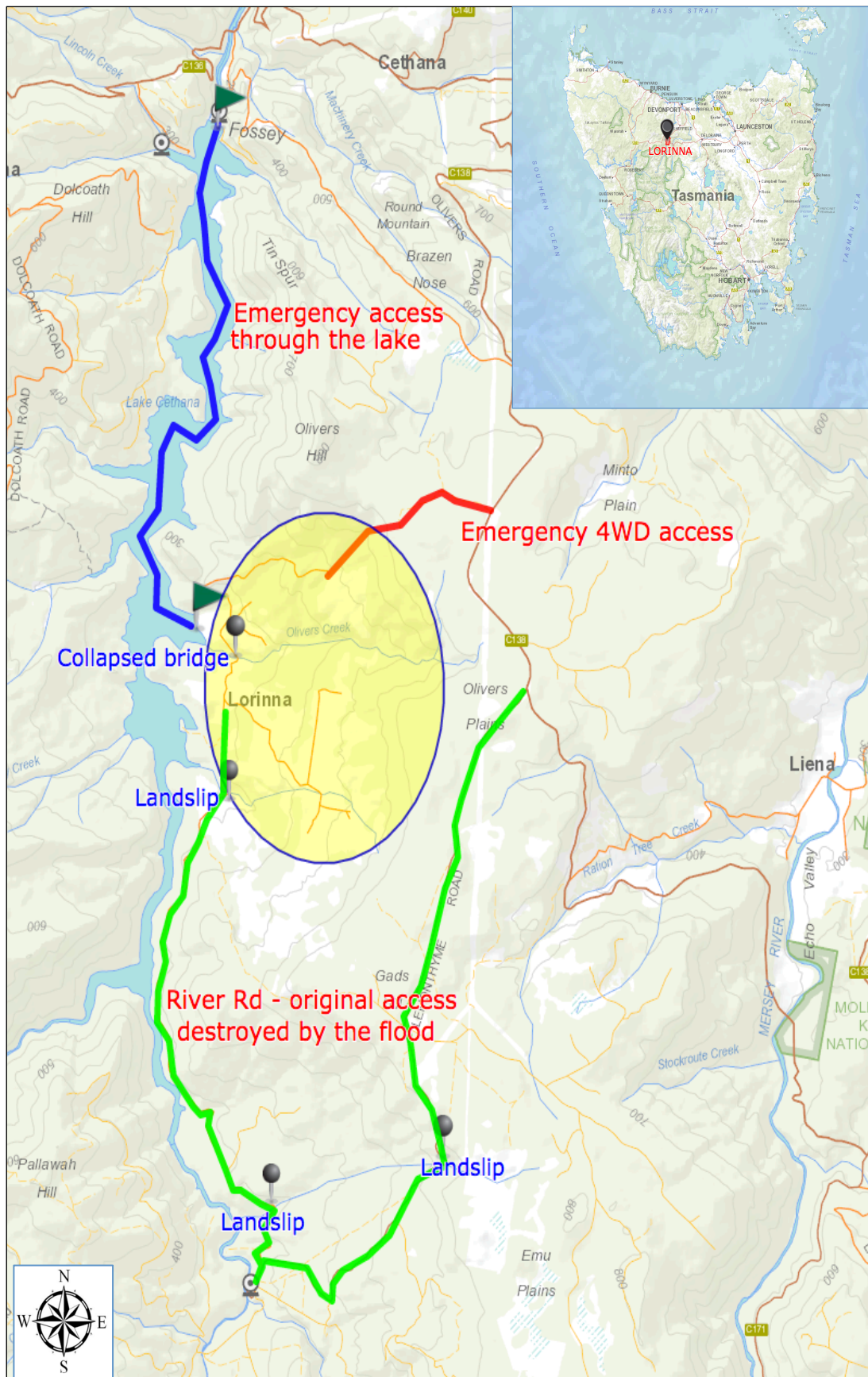


Figure 26: Tamas Oszvald, *Map of Lorinna*, 2017, computer image.